Lise Dheedene

Moving Heaven and Earth

Evangelical Solidarities in the Flemish Welfare Regime from a Postsecular Perspective

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De ene horizon kijkt klaar
in de andere.
Alle dingen zien elkaar
en dit is goed als een gezin aan tafel,
wetend: iedereen is daar.

As I ran across this Herman de Coninck piece one night, an unexpected gratitude overtook me. More often than not, this research project has left me feeling lost in space. But what a blessing it was (yes, I have come to appreciate evangelical language) to space out surrounded by people I appreciate and love.

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Summary

This thesis explores the roles of evangelical inspired solidarities in the largely secularized Flemish welfare regime. It starts from the observation that sociology's concepts of solidarity have remained defined predominantly in structural and secular terms, eclipsing the emergence of new, bottom-up initiatives, including religiously inspired articulations of solidarity and love of neighbor. To shed new light on these solidarities, by contrast, it adopts the **postsecular** perspective developed by Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont. This perspective enables us to examine the interplay of the religious and the secular in ways that depart from traditional binary frames.

By turning the gaze to an **unexpected** case, however, – a young minority religion that has just begun to pave its way in a post-corporatist and traditionally Catholic welfare context – this thesis adds to and complicates the assertions made by these scholars. Most notably, it nuances their rosy portrayal of what they call "postsecular rapprochements" in West European welfare regimes, defined as dialogical coming togethers of secular and religious voices around mutual ethical concerns like poverty, creating liminal spaces of religious-secular interaction.

Starting from the assumption that postsecular rapprochement cannot be but *one* among myriad religious-secular interaction patterns in religious and welfare landscapes so complex and multi-layered, it discerns **five patterns of religious-secular interaction beyond postsecular rapprochement**. Drawing on document analysis, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and field work in seven evangelical solidarity initiatives in Ghent and Antwerp, it more specifically identifies "stretched postsecular rapprochement", "parallel moral economies", "semiotic guerrilla warfare", "pragmatic rapprochement", and "subversive love of neighbor".

In proposing these ideal types which are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, this thesis both adds to the literature on postsecular rapprochement in contexts of social welfare and provides a tool for workers in the field to navigate potential challenges.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift verkent de rol van evangelisch geïnspireerde vormen van solidariteit in het grotendeels gesecularíseerde Vlaamse welzijnslandschap. Het vertrekt vanuit de observatie dat sociologische solidariteitsconcepten hoofdzakelijk in structurele en seculiere termen gedefinieerd worden, waardoor de opkomst van nieuwe, van onderuit gegroeide initiatieven, zoals religieus geïnspireerde uitingen van solidariteit en naastenliefde, onderbelicht blijven. Om een nieuw licht te werpen op deze solidariteiten maakt het daarentegen gebruik van het **postseculiere perspectief** dat is ontwikkeld door Paul Cloke en Justin Beaumont. Dit perspectief maakt het mogelijk om het samenspel tussen het religieuze en het seculiere te onderzoeken op een manier die traditionele tweedelingen overstijgt.

Door de aandacht te vestigen op een **onverwachtse case** – een jonge minderheidsreligie die net begonnen is haar weg te banen in een post-corporatistische en traditioneel katholieke welzijnscontext –, draagt dit proefschrift echter bij aan en nuanceert het de beweringen van deze wetenschappers. Met name nuanceert het hun rooskleurige voorstelling van wat zij "postseculiere toenaderingen" noemen, namelijk situaties waarin seculiere en religieuze stemmen dialogisch samenkomen rond gemeenschappelijke ethische zorgen zoals armoede, en waarbij ze hybride ruimtes van religieus-seculiere interactie creëren.

Vertrekkend vanuit de veronderstelling dat postseculiere toenadering niet meer kan zijn dan één van de vele religieus-seculiere interactiepatronen in religieuze en welzijnslandschappen die zo complex en veelzijdig zijn, onderscheidt het **vijf patronen van religieus-seculiere interactie bovenop postseculiere toenadering**. Op basis van documentanalyse, semi-gestructureerde diepte-interviews en veldwerk in zeven evangelische solidariteitsinitiatieven in Gent en Antwerpen identficeert het in het bijzonder "uitgerekte postseculiere toenadering", "parallelle morele economieën", "semiotische guerrillaoorlogsvoering", "pragmatische toenadering" en "subversieve naastenliefde".

Door deze ideaaltypes te onderscheiden, die noch volledig noch onderling exclusief zijn, draagt dit proefschrift bij aan de literatuur over postseculiere toenadering in contexten van sociaal welzijn en biedt het een instrument voor mensen werkzaam op het terrein om mogelijke uitdagingen het hoofd te bieden.

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Intro

Over the past decades, religious landscapes across Europe have witnessed fundamental transformations produced by complex and simultaneous processes of secularization and re-enchantment. As historically dominant religions faced remarkable declines in adherence and influence, myriad new forms of belief and non-belief emerged, all co-existing, intersecting, competing, and clashing.

This thesis revolves around one aspect of this profound societal change: the resurgence of religious-inspired solidarities in largely secularized welfare regimes, in particular the Flemish. It starts from two observations. First, European welfare regimes, including the Flemish, have created new opportunities for the emergence of local initiatives and forms of social innovation (Oosterlynck et al., 2013). Second, among them are religiously inspired initiatives, "filling the gaps" generated by this reorganizing regime (Dierckx, Kerstens, & Vranken, 2009; Schrooten, Thys, & Debruyne, 2019). In Flanders, these include not only long-established Catholic charities, but also younger Islamic-inspired organizations, mosques (see Kanmaz, 2007), Protestant and emerging evangelical initiatives and churches. These informal players often work in the "shadows" of formal welfare infrastructure (Schrooten et al., 2019).

Practices of solidarity prompted by religious faith, it is argued, possess some unique qualities (Beaumont & Cloke, 2012b; S. Van Dam, Maes, Schrooten, Broeckaert, & Raeymaeckers, 2022). Due to their localized approach and grass roots nature, they display a distinct feel for what is moving in their neighborhood (Cloke, 2011b). Often, they take place in deprived areas among excluded groups to which formal instances face difficulty gaining access (Chapman & Hamalainen, 2011, p. 186; Sider, 2005, p. 498). Not seldom, members or volunteers of these faith communities belong to these vulnerable groups themselves. Finally, faith-based practices of care intrinsically carry a spiritual dimension, fostering a receptivity to existential questions and encouraging a holistic understanding of care (Baker & Skinner, 2006; Davelaar & Kerstens, 2012).

Since a decennium, therefore, scholars across Europe have started to reconsider the roles of faith-based initiatives in welfare regimes, suggesting a potential complementarity and seeing in them an antidote for what Charles Taylor has somewhat melodramatically referred to as the "utter flatness, the emptiness of the ordinary" reigning our time (Taylor, 2007, p. 309). Given the decennia of radio silence on the subject matter in academia, this is a remarkable shift, to say the least.

The idea of appealing to religious forms of solidarity, indeed, has not sit easily in the intellectual climate of the last decades. Sociology in particular remained surprisingly religion blind during most of the 20th century (Gorski, Kim, Torpey, & VanAntwerpen, 2012, pp. 3-5; Vanderstraeten & Louckx, 2018; Wils, 2017). Common explanations trace back to its historical role as a discipline established amidst the turmoil of 19th century Europe. The formation of its legitimacy and conceptual apparatus, it is then argued, became intricately bound up with the project of secular Modernity. On the one hand, sociology's emergence as a discipline was driven by the urge to make sense of the disruptive social transformations that were turning European societies modern (Stjernø, 2005, p. 39). On the other, as a regime of knowledge, sociology provided the very set of categories that came to shape modern (secular) self-understanding (Bracke & Fadil, 2008). In this context, solidarity became one of sociology's founding concepts, serving as the answer to the discipline's "quest for a renewed social order" (Oosterlynck, Loopmans, Schuermans, Vandenabeele, & Zemni, 2016, p. 765). Rather than in intimate personal feelings or individual relationships to God, the sources for solidarity in this respect were sought in society's *structures,* with specific forms deriving from for instance the division of labor, unequal class relations and societal institutions. Religion in 20th century sociology became a remnant from the past, an anachronism bound to disappear or at least be relegated to the private sphere under the influence of the progressive differentiation of spheres. Religion became Modernity's main Other, as it got caught up in a binary epistemic system where it was put in direct opposition to the public and the rational (Asad, 1993; Vásquez, 2013). A lot has moved in the last decades – most notably, the vibrant subdiscipline of sociology of religion has seen significant developments since the 1980s (Gorski & Altınordu, 2008; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999) and scholars have increasingly recognized that the work of the proto- and first sociologists like Comte, Weber and Durkheim was imbued by religious imaginary and beliefs (M. Van Dam, 2024)–, but sociologists have not finished the task of deconstructing and escaping this deeply rooted way of thinking.

Within this modern frame of thought, the ultimate solidarity in its most universal and structural form supposedly took shape in the welfare state, heralded as "the historically determined breakthrough of modernity in society" (Cantillon & Buysse, 2016, p. 30; referring to Deleeck, 2008, p. 44). Installed in post-war Europe, welfare states institutionalized sharing the social risks of illness, unemployment, disability and old age within the territorial boundaries of nation states via the redistribution of taxes on labor and capital, and the financial support of civil society organizations. Welfare states were seen not only as redistribution mechanisms but as *moral* economies, underpinned by the *secular* principles of equality, citizenship and social rights (e.g. Mau, 2004). They have, in this respect, been considered an "unequaled high-end form of living together, the spiritual ideal of Europe" (Deleeck, 1992).

From the 1970s onwards, however, many of the assumptions on which welfare states were built, including the nuclear family, an industrialized labor market, strong national political structures and cultural homogeneity, have been subject to change. Most notably, kinship ties weakened, the economy globalized and shifted towards a service economy and the nation state model came under increasing pressure. As in all European welfare regimes, social policy in Belgium (further) decentralized, leaving more room for partnerships and innovation at the local level. Meanwhile, sociology's concepts of solidarity have remained very much defined in structural and secular terms. In this thesis, I take as a starting point that this has obscured the emergence of new, bottom up initiatives that are less bound to the territory of nation states, including religiously-inspired articulations of solidarity and love of neighbor (Oosterlynck, 2018; Oosterlynck, Schuermans, & Loopmans, 2017).

In order to shed new light on these emerging solidarities, by contrast, I will adopt the "postsecular" perspective developed by human geographers Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013). This perspective enables studying the *co-production* of the religious and the secular in ways that transcend the traditional view of them being antithetical. In this respect, these scholars have identified the emergence of what they call "postsecular rapprochements" in West-European welfare regimes, that is, dialogical coming-togethers of multiple religious and secular voices over common ethical concerns like poverty, producing liminal and reflexive spaces of religious-secular engagement. Welfare landscapes like the Flemish which are marked by religious diversity and decentralizing social policies, have been considered promising contexts for the emergence of such postsecular rapprochements (Beaumont & Baker, 2011; Beaumont & Cloke, 2012a).

And yet, I suggest, in religious and welfare landscapes so complex and multi-layered, postsecular rapprochement cannot be but one among many religious-secular interaction patterns. Nor can it be expected to come in just one form. Whereas the research of Cloke and Beaumont has predominantly focused on the role of historically dominant religions in heavily neo-liberalized welfare regimes, I will therefore concentrate on a religious tradition that is just beginning to search its place in a post-corporatist welfare landscape whose contours were largely drawn by Catholicism, namely Evangelical Christianity in Flanders. Turning the gaze toward this young minority religion allows us to discern articulations between the religious and the secular that move beyond postsecular rapprochement.

Drawing on in-depth interviews, field work and document analysis in seven evangelical-inspired solidarity initiatives in Flanders, I will identify *five patterns* of religious-secular interaction beyond

postsecular rapprochement. These include respectively “stretched postsecular rapprochement”, “parallel moral economies”, “semiotic guerrilla warfare”, “pragmatic rapprochement”, and “subversive love of neighbor”. By distinguishing these ideal types which are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, I hope to add to and complexify the literature on postsecular rapprochement in contexts of social welfare and provide a tool for workers in the field to navigate potential challenges.

The book will proceed as follows. In the first chapter, I will clarify and contextualize the postsecular perspective adopted, concluding with a particular set of research questions. In the second, I will sketch the empirical setting of the research and underscore its potential for studying modes of postsecular rapprochement. Specifically, I will paint a picture of the Flemish welfare landscape and its historical entanglement with religion and provide a brief historical overview of evangelical Christianity in Flanders. The third will discuss the methodological choices I made, in particular the case selection, the qualitative research methods, my positionalities as a researcher and the ethical dilemmas I faced during the research. After these three introductory chapters, the second part will elaborate upon the typology just mentioned. In chapter four, I will discuss “stretched postsecular rapprochement”, a pattern in which faith and other divides are overcome by means of a structure with multiple levels of interaction, all learning from each other at different rhythms and in proportion to their resources. Chapter five will address “parallel moral economies”, where evangelical and secular welfare grammars are built alongside, rather than in coproduction with each other. Chapter six discusses a pattern which I call “semiotic guerrilla warfare”, in which an evangelical solidarity is built around an evangelical appropriation of secular language with the aim of re-christianizing the welfare system from within. In chapter seven, I will deal with a case of “pragmatic rapprochement”, in which evangelicals work together with formal secular welfare actors for mere pragmatic reasons, without the emergence of ethical crossovers. Chapter eight will discern “subversive love of neighbor”, where evangelical actors redraw and implicitly call into question common lines of exclusion employed by formal, secular welfare actors.

PART ONE

Chapter 1: A postsecular perspective

"It makes a difference whether we speak with one another or merely about one another" (Habermas, 2010)

Ever since Jürgen Habermas introduced the concept of the "postsecular" in 2001, it has sparked fierce debate across the social sciences. Most notably, accounts of the postsecular have questioned secularization narratives by reconsidering their normative underpinnings and underscoring the enduring relevance of religion (Graham, 2017, p. 277). Despite prevailing and at times valid skepticism, I align with many philosophers, sociologists, theologists and geographers who see this set of theories as a valuable conceptual repository for studying religion in pluralist contexts; the more so since they capture the period of reflexivity and confusion scholars of religion currently find themselves in.

Successfully navigating the puzzling postsecular, however, requires us to disentangle the various and often conflicting meanings it contains (Beaumont, 2018, p. 4). This opening chapter, therefore, specifies the postsecular perspective I will adopt in this thesis, situating it within the broader field of postsecular theory. It will begin by briefly setting the contours of Habermas' initial theory. Subsequently, it will identify four closely entwined ways in which the postsecular concept has been used in academic work building on his grounds, namely as an *empirical* reality, an *epistemological* stance, a *political philosophical* frame and an *analytical* lens. Although these approaches largely overlap and tend to imply each other, I will opt employing it primarily in the latter sense, namely as a gaze through which to examine the co-production of the secular and the religious in particular contexts.

1.1. Habermas' Postsecular Society

It was a few weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 in a speech named "Glauben und Wissen" that Jürgen Habermas made a remarkable call to recognize the enduring potential of religious traditions in secularizing societies (Habermas, 2001). Stressing not only the importance of mutual tolerance between religious and secular traditions, but also the necessity of complementary listening and learning, the German philosopher and sociologist made a case for revisioning the relation between Modernity and Religion. Given his earlier adherence to a Weberian thesis of rationalization, this took many by surprise. In this section, I will discuss Habermas's unexpected turn towards religion, what he meant by a post-secular society, and frame it within his earlier thinking.

Already in his earliest classic "Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit", Habermas stressed the importance of the public sphere as a free arena for citizens to engage in rational conversation, seeing its vibrancy

as an indispensable ingredient of legitimate political decision making (Habermas, 1962). This idea was further developed in his theory of Communicative Action, most notably by what he called the ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1981a). The ideal speech situation, he contended, occurs when individuals recognize each other as equal and rational partners and enter into a dialogue that is free from power dynamics. For this to succeed, the individuals should share a horizon of meaning (the lifeworld) within which they can negotiate definitions, settle disagreements and arrive at agreements. What is rational, then, can only be developed in this process: a statement obtains rationality "if it *could* be accepted with good reasons by *everyone* involved" (Habermas, 1981a, p. 91).

It is from this theoretical setting that one has to understand Habermas's initial conviction that religion was doomed to disappear. Because of their specific sacral nature, Habermas reasoned, religious statements were not or no longer translatable to universally shared assumptions. They had, in other words, become irrational. As an explanation, Habermas pointed to the increased realization of the rational potential of communication: As modernity progressed, people began to rely on reflexivity and critical thinking rather than cultural (religious) knowledge, and shared horizons were challenged. This rationalization process, so Habermas claimed, occurred in all spheres (the cultural, the institutional, the structures of personality) and resulted in the institutionalization of dissent and research, the creation of democratic political institutions and the universalization of basic education. Religious claims in this transformed lifeworld could no longer remain underpinned by shared background convictions and were replaced by "a consensus that is not merely reproduced but achieved, that is, brought about communicatively" (Habermas, 1981b, p. 89). Thus, religion, in the end, had nothing to offer public debate and politics anymore, according to Habermas.

Twenty years later, however, the German philosopher shifted his position for reasons both empirical and normative. First, as was evidenced by the 9/11 attacks as well as the Iranian revolution and the rise of liberation theology in South America in the 1970s, religion had anything but disappeared. Second, if religion did not disappear, it was his opinion that secular societies should learn how to live with it. In the midst of a climate of scepsis toward religions, therefore, Habermas now highlighted their abilities, including their "semantic potential" (Habermas, 2006, p. 17) and their "special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life" (Habermas, 2006, p. 10). Meanwhile, he saw some deficiencies in societies devoid of mystique. In 2010, he admits: "Practical reason fails to fulfil its own vocation when it no longer has sufficient strength to awaken, and to keep awake, in the minds of secular subjects, an awareness of the violations of solidarity throughout the world, an awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven" (Habermas, 2010,

p. 19). Thus, as María Herrera Lima observes, Habermas's postsecular project consists in "finding a way to make compatible the continued presence of religion (everywhere) with the cognitive advances of modern consciousness postulated by his theory of communicative rationality" (Lima, 2013, p. 93). In particular, it searches a way to reinvigorate the role of religion in liberal democracies without compromising on their gains and the universal values of freedom and equality they are grounded in. What exactly then does Habermas envision for a postsecular society? First of all, like John Rawls' political liberalism (Rawls, 1993), a postsecular society requires a secular (i.e. neutral) state in order to keep equal distance from all comprehensive doctrines, secular or religious. Thus, it is marked by a type of state secularity which *enables* rather than obstructs the flourishing of religious traditions in the public sphere. Second, a postsecular society moves beyond a mere desecularized one, but calls upon to live together across difference. According to Habermas "the liberal state depends on a political integration of citizens that goes beyond a mere *modus vivendi*" (Habermas, 2008a, p. 112). In order to achieve such a state, both secular and religious citizens are expected to meet some specified conditions and engage in what Habermas calls a "complementary learning process".

On the secular side, such learning process involves that secular naturalism should evolve towards a "postmetaphysical thinking" which reflexively recognizes the relativity of its own metaphysical viewpoints. Secular citizens, in other words, should understand that "naturalistic worldviews based upon speculative elaborations of scientific findings that have implications for citizens' ethical self-understanding by no means enjoy prima facie priority over competing worldviews or religious outlooks in the political public sphere" (Habermas, 2008, p. 113). Secondly, secular citizens should not rule out the possibility that religious worldviews *could* contain truth. They should, in other words, refrain from categorizing religious reasoning as a priori irrational (Habermas, 2008, p. 5). As such, Habermas writes, secular citizens should "understand their non-agreement with religious conceptions as a *disagreement* that is *reasonable* to expect" (Habermas, 2008, p. 139). Finally, religions should be given recognition as semantic reservoirs of meaning and connotations that have not yet been translated into secular language and may have gotten lost in the course of rationalization.

On the religious side, religions are expected to enter a stage of "reflexivity". This means that religious citizens, while recognizing the universal freedom of religion and conscience, should accept that disagreement on religious truths is legitimate (Habermas, 2008, p. 137). They should, moreover, acknowledge the authority and autonomy of secular science in generating factual knowledge (Habermas, 2008, p. 137). Finally, they must be prepared to accept the neutrality (i.e. secularity) of state power and come to terms with the universal values of freedom and equality which serve as the

pillars of the liberal political order (Habermas, 2008a, p. 137). Since religions remain "comprehensive" doctrines laying claim to life in its entirety, such learning processes are no easy tasks. The Catholic Church, Habermas argues, did not undergo hers until the 1960s, with Vaticanum II as the turning point (Habermas, 2010, p. 20). Others, in his view, are still at the beginning of this process of adaptation. Habermas in this regard explicitly mentions Islam (Habermas, 2008b, p. 28) and Evangelical Christianity, the Born-Again mentality of which "is marked by a fundamentalism founded on a literal interpretation of holy scripture" (Habermas, 2010, p. 20).
Related to these prescriptions concerning the relationship between secular and religious worldviews in the public sphere, Habermas also takes a stance on the public use of religious reason and how far its influence should extend in formal secular state structures (Habermas, 2006; 2008a, chapter 5). He largely follows Rawls' conception in doing so. This vision situates itself somewhere between an exclusionist position which assumes that religion contaminates the impartiality of political decision making, and the inclusionist conviction that religion can enrich it (see Loobuyck & Rummens, 2009).

For Rawls, religion can indeed contribute politically, if not under certain conditions (Rawls, 1997, p. 776).[1] Important in this respect is his distinction between what he calls "the public political forum", which includes "the discourse of judges in their decisions, and especially of the judges of a supreme court; the discourse of government officials, especially chief executives and legislators; and finally, the discourse of candidates for public office and their campaign managers, especially in their public oratory, party platforms, and political statement" (Rawls, 1997, p. 767), and the "background culture", which he defines as the sphere of civil society (Rawls, 1997, p. 768). While the former is subject to the idea of public reason, Rawls argues, the latter is not. Put differently, whereas government officials in the public forum carry the duty to justify their positions on political matters in terms that are accessible and reasonably acceptable to citizens of all faith, citizens in the background culture can fully enjoy the freedoms of thought, speech, religion, and association. This division, in turn, underpins what Rawls refers to as "the Proviso" (Rawls, 1997, p. 776). The proviso prescribes that, when entering the public political forum, propositions and statements originating from the background culture should be translated into public reasons in order to ensure state neutrality.

This proviso which separates private reason from public principle was adopted by Habermas (Habermas, 2008a, p. 130). Thus, Habermas like Rawls underlines the necessity of state neutrality in a pluralistic society. Habermas's version, however, slightly differed from the one proposed by Rawls (Loobuyck & Rummens, 2009). Important in this respect is his division of the public sphere into a

[1] Rawls has revised his vision a few times. His final vision is in his 1997 article "The idea of public reason revisited"

"formal" and an "informal" segment. The formal public sphere, he argues, is where political *decisions* are made by civil servants and politicians (i.e. Rawls' public political forum). The informal sphere is where political *opinions* are formed by citizens and civil society (i.e. Rawls' background culture). Whereas Rawls thinks translation should happen in the formal sphere, Habermas contends that opinions should already be translated in the informal sphere, at least if they wish to gain entrance into the formal public sphere. Thus, while religious arguments can still be formulated in religious terms in the context of for instance media, organizations and universities, they must already be converted into secular and universally accessible reasons at the level of political decision-making, for instance in the parliament. As an example of such successful translation, Habermas refers to the conversion of the Christian idea that all humans are created in God's image into the secular principle of human dignity (Habermas, 2008a, p. 210).

To conclude, Habermas's postsecular society transcends the classical conception of secularization being a "Nullsummenspiel" (zerosumgame) between religion and modernity (Habermas, 2001, p. 65). Rather, it advocates a "self-understanding of society as a whole in which the vigorous continuation of religion in a continually secularizing environment must be reckoned with" (Habermas, 2005, p. 26). This altered reality, however, does demand both religious and secular traditions to *transform* and adapt to each other in a complementary learning process, an important aspect of which consists of the practice of (mutual) translation.

1.2. Four dimensions of the postsecular

Habermas's postsecular society has been constitutive of debates over the role of religion. Most notably, the postsecular concept itself has evolved in multiple directions. While some argue that the term has become a catch-all concept containing too many and often incompatible meanings (Bader, 2012; Beckford, 2012; A. L. Molendijk, 2015), I share the stance of De Vriese and Vanheeswijck that it carries an important "performative force": Its growing prevalence in various fields of study has induced a paradigm shift or "turn" in the theoretical framing of religion (De Vriese & Vanheeswijck, 2018; also McLennan, 2010). Using it not only allows one to situate one's research and positionality as a researcher, but also to contribute to a necessary shift in thinking about the role and significance of religion in today's superdiverse societies.

In addressing the need for clarity, several scholars have come up with typologies. While some have done so based on different understandings of the secular (Casanova, 2011; Olson, Hopkins, Pain, & Vincett, 2013), others grounded their distinctions in scholarly positions towards religion and the

postsecular (Beckford, 2012; Coviello & Hickman, 2014; McLennan, 2007; A. L. Molendijk, 2015; Stacey, 2017; Stoeckl & Uzlaner). Although I will not provide a detailed discussion of these typologies, I contend that they arouse confusion rather than create clarity. More specifically, the terminology they assign to the categories falls short of addressing the core of what sets them apart. Drawing on a literature review I therefore propose an alternative typology which hinges on what I consider to be the most fundamental difference in how the postsecular concept has been used, namely the ontological realm in which it resides. In particular, I analytically differentiate an "empirical", "epistemological", "political philosophical" and "analytical" dimension or layer in the postsecular concept. In the next sections, I will briefly present these dimensions, both in an attempt to shed light on the complexity of the postsecular concept and to situate my own use of it.

1.2.1. The empirical dimension

The first is the empirical dimension, where the postsecular concept is used to describe a pluralist religious context marked by a separation between religion and politics. The "post" in this regard relates to the empirical inaccuracy of previous statements anticipating a declining prevalence and significance of religion, known as the classical secularization theses of the 1960s (see Berger, 2011; Dobbelaere, 1981; B. Wilson, 1966). The three connotations of secularization theory identified by José Casanova will help us understand how the postsecular has opposed these predictions (Casanova, 1994).

The first connotation is the so-called "functional differentiation" of social spheres, which was long considered the main causal engine and sometimes even a synonym of secularization. Its central idea holds that as social domains including economy, science and politics grew autonomous, the overarching value system of the Church (a "sacred canopy") dissolved (Berger, 2011). This was most clearly symptomized by the separation of church and state in several Western countries. Yet, for the most part, it developed more latently, resulting in an overall waning significance of religious values in the integration and legitimization of everyday life (Dobbelaere, 1981; Hellemans, 2007). While many have placed question marks against the universalist use of this differentiation thesis and the normative evaluations it contains, its core idea is still widely considered valid. Most empirical applications of the postsecular in this respect assume a constitutional separation between altar and throne (e.g. Barbato & Kratochwil, 2009; Della Dora, 2018).

Rather, it is Casanova's second connotation of secularization theory that has become contested, namely the conviction that religion would recede into society's interstices as a result of differentiation. This privatization thesis has simply proven empirically wrong. Instead, scholars speak of a

"resurgence" of religion in the public sphere, illustrated with events like the rise of the Christian right in the US, the events surrounding the Arab Spring and ongoing global religious wars, including Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (e.g. Beaumont, Eder, & Mendieta, 2020; A. Molendijk, Beaumont, & Jedan, 2010, pp. 8-13). Although not every expression of religious renewal should automatically be considered a proof of a wholesale resurgence (Turner, 2012, p. 137) and a secular age as such has never existed (Hellemans, 2019; Joas, 2008; Kong, 2010; Oosterbaan, Machado, Buikema, Buyse, & Robben, 2019, p. 108; Ungureanu & Thomassen, 2015), such events bring back religion in public consciousness. "Postsecular" in this regard both points to a public resurgence of religion itself and to a shifted public consciousness in western secularized societies and cities (Beaumont & Baker, 2011).

Casanova's third connotation of secularization is the decline in individual belief and practice. Whereas traditional church attendance has indeed witnessed a decline in many European societies, new forms of religiosity have surged, propelled by global dynamics like migration. Far from shrinking, it is argued, the possibilities for belief have expanded (Shagan, 2019). This phenomenon was captured by Charles Taylor as the "nova effect", pointing to an endless diversification of religious and secular beliefs "across the span of the thinkable and perhaps even beyond" (Taylor, 2007, p. 299). A postsecular context in the empirical sense, one could say, is affected by the nova effect. It is one in which "the secular and the religious coexist, overlap and compete" (Della Dora, 2018, p. 45).

1.2.2. The epistemological dimension

The second dimension is epistemological in nature. Engaging with the postsecular in this respect involves a willingness to explore the potential of religion in ways that depart from modern linear and dichotomous thinking. While Habermas arguably has taken important steps away from such a frame, many believe he did not take it far enough. One of the main critiques leveled against his postsecular society in this respect is that it still "holds on to problematic secularist stadial assumptions that relegate religion to a stage of development superseded by postmetaphysical philosophical or scientific thinking" (Casanova, 2013, p. 48; De Vriese & Vanheeswijck, 2018; Leezenberg, 2010; Singh, 2012). Regarding his notion of neutrality being secular, for instance, Habermas fails to acknowledge that the secular can never be universal, since it is conditioned by a specific European and Christian history. Scholars in this regard usually refer to the age-long conflicts over papal and monarchical power, the doctrine of the Two Swords, the confessional wars following the reformation, the ensuing Peace of Westphalia establishing the principle of "cuius region, eio religio" and the Enlightenment (Calhoun, 2012). A similar critique applies to his overly rationalized conception of religion (Dillon, 2012, p. 271; Holloway, 2012; Olson, Hopkins, Pain, et al., 2013). Underpinned by a specific West-European post-

Reformation genealogy, Habermas's concept of religion is one of disembodied souls. This, many have argued, is problematic. First, it oversimplifies a complex phenomenon (Beckford, 2012, p. 17). Second, it is the kind of religion which has served as the measure to judge the adequacy of other religions (Mahmood, 2005, p. xiii; Smith, 2012). Aside from its Eurocentric overtones, Habermas's postsecular society and in particular its insistence on translation have been criticized for instrumentalizing religion: it takes religious reasoning into consideration as long as it is *useful*, while tacitly questioning the possibility of it being *true* (Calhoun, 2011; Stacey, 2017).

The postsecular concept itself has formed one avenue to elaborate upon these criticisms and further deconstruct the modern narrative that frames the secular as a transhistorical and -cultural condition in which Man dominates nature and knowledge within the set-up of nation states. Many post-secular perspectives, in this respect, share concerns with post-colonial perspectives (Abeysekara, 2008; Asad, 2003, p. 15; Chakrabarty, 1992; Lloyd & Viefhues-Bailey, 2015). Both recognize the historical function of modern binaries including tradition/modernity, public/private and politics/religion as instruments in orientalism to "enlighten" the non-West (Breckenridge & Van der Veer, 1993). Most notably, both acknowledge that the secular-religious distinction has operated as a technique of oppression for the West to assert dominance over the colonized (Gao, Qian, & Yuan, 2018; Kong, 2010; Ratti, 2018). The question then holds: If a Western secular frame of thought which is indebted to highly contextual historical circumstances including the Reformation and the Westphalian settlement cannot be applied to non-western contexts nor to current superdiverse societies, can a postsecular frame that relies on the same categories? Among users of the concept, the answer is affirmative: Rather than eliminating the religious-secular categories, postsecular epistemology seeks to de-essentialize them by disconnecting them from the long-standing rationale which views "secularism as a site in which religion remains located in a traditional past from which a de-divinized modernity has liberated itself" (Abeysekara, 2008, p. 177). A postsecular epistemology, in other words, is about provincializing the secular. It involves recognizing its European origins, acknowledging the deep historical roots it shares with the religious, and viewing it as a presence rather than the mere absence of religion (Calhoun, 2012). Postsecular inquiries in this respect are "intra-secularist" rather than "anti-secularist", according to Mc Lennan: "They form part of the intellectual process that has been dubbed the 'secularization of secularism' itself, rather than straightforwardly extending the 'revival of religion' into the heartlands of Western theory" (McLennan, 2010, p. 4).

To conclude, the epistemological postsecular endeavor involves an inquiry into the secularist assumptions and epistemes of social theory, including those of postsecular theory itself (Bracke, 2008,

p. 64). Holding a postsecular epistemology in this respect does not per se entail escaping modernity's conceptual apparatus. However, it does involve a continuous questioning and reflexivity of one's analytical tools, concepts and positionalities.

1.2.3. The political philosophical dimension

A third way in which the postsecular has been used is political philosophical in nature. The postsecular in this respect points to normative debates about the accommodation of religion in deliberative democracies. Such debates have revolved around questions like whether Habermas' burden of translation could be called symmetrical (Loobuyck & Rummens, 2009), whether a cognitive openness towards religion can be expected from secular subjects (Lafont, 2007), whether one can expect religious citizens to place secular state authority over that of God (Loobuyck & Rummens, 2009), or whether the demand of translation into a generally accessible language *before* entering the decision making process makes sense (Cooke, 2007). Although much disagreement exists as to how exactly it should be organized, most scholars agree that, in its basic form, an ideal-typical postsecular society consists of a secular (i.e. neutral) state in order to enable the flourishing of all comprehensive doctrines, religious or secular.

1.2.4. The analytical dimension

Finally, the postsecular has been used as an analytical lens for examining the interplay of secular and religious discourses, practices and ethics in particular contexts (e.g. Abraham, 2015; Bracke, 2008; Cloke, Baker, Sutherland, & Williams, 2019; Della Dora, 2018; Stacey, 2017; Tse, 2014). This use shifts the attention from how the religious and the secular *should* interact to how they *do* interact, allowing us to assess practical dynamics against normative ideals proposed by Habermas. In this section I will focus on one such perspective, namely the one which will provide the analytical concepts through which I will examine the role of Evangelical-inspired solidarities in the Flemish welfare regime. This perspective is developed by human geographers among whom the most notable are Paul Cloke from the UK and Justin Beaumont from the Netherlands. Their framework equips us, as they put it, with "the technologies, tools, vocabularies with which to make sense of the ambiguities and relationalities between the religious and the non-religious in political and ethical life that are not currently best served through conventional grammars of analysis" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 30). The following sections will introduce their perspective and analytical tools.

1.3. The postsecular perspective of Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont

About a decade ago, Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont noticed a fascinating interplay between retrenching welfare states on the one hand and (re-)emerging Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) on the other (Beaumont, 2008, 2010; Beaumont & Cloke, 2012a; Beaumont & Dias, 2008; Cloke, 2010, 2011b). In the face of persistent skepticism regarding religious solidarity in academia, they posed themselves the following questions: What if we approached these faith-driven actors as potential vehicles of social change, resistance, and shared citizenship? What if, more so than on paternalism and voluntarism, they relied on a politics of hope? During fieldwork, these scholars observed how many FBOs operated as "urban laboratories", bringing together multiple religious and secular voices over common ethical issues and needs. Through this gaze, FBOs emerged as arenas of intricate religious-secular exchange and transformation, marked by processes of reflexive and experimental "crossing over" (Williams, 2015).

While critics maintain that such religious-secular liaisons are old hat in European welfare regimes deeply shaped by Christianity (e.g. Kong, 2010; Ley, 2011), Paul Cloke and colleagues assert that the conditions have changed such that their intensity is now brought to a new level (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 4-5). Today's radically plural cities, they state, have generated both a heightened need for meaning making, especially in marginalized communities, and an unprecedented wealth of opportunities for different faith groups to get in touch with each other. Working in an Anglo-saxon context, these scholars mainly owed these evolutions to neo-liberalization: After the "hollowing out", "entrenchment" or "withdrawal" of welfare states, FBOs have stepped in to address the voids (Cloke, May, & Williams, 2020). In the Flemish context, I will argue later, this should be ascribed to other forces, including the so-called subsidiarization of social policy (see chapter 2).

Against the backdrop of these observations, Cloke and colleagues developed an analytical toolkit to examine emergent religious-secular nexuses in particular spaces, sites and practices. By turning the gaze to "what are often small-scale and subtle circumstances and events", they shifted the attention to the *situatedness* of Habermasian propositions like complementary learning processes and translation (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 52). The next sections will discuss some of its central analytical concepts, in particular "religion" and "secularity", "postsecular rapprochement", "postsecularity", and "receptive generosity". Being empirically observable phenomena, all of these concepts are intimately entangled with the empirical dimension I have distinguished earlier. Rooted in the ethos of Habermas's postsecular society, moreover, they all are normatively charged. In this research, however, I will rather approach them as lenses or analytical devices.

1.3.1. *Religion and secularity*

As mentioned earlier, a postsecular epistemology entails de-essentializing rather than eliminating the religious and secular categories. Scholars tied to the postsecular strand in human geography in this respect hold an open view of religion, reluctant to understand it as a mere cognitive choice. Inspired by William Connolly's visceral approach to religion (Connolly, 1999), they view it as a complex assemblage of belief, praxis, ethics, subjectivity, affect and materiality, the relations between which they view as context contingent. In their most recent book, religion is defined as follows: "We regard religion to be conditions of being and cultural systems of belief and faith-practice that seek imperfectly to interconnect humanity with the spiritual and the transcendental" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 1). The secular then is described as "a political project to deny religion a place in the affairs of state; an imperfect social structure designed to limit conflict by privileging universal human rights above any religious demands (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 1). This definition leaves room for the religious and the secular to affect each other. "In these terms", they write: "religion is nether cancelled out, nor taken over by an increasingly secularized society. Rather, over time the religious and the secular are becoming co-assembled in interesting new ways" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 1).

1.3.2. *Postsecular rapprochement*

"Postsecular rapprochement" forms a first central concept in the apparatus of the postsecular strand in human geography. It refers to those situations where secular and religious voices come together dialogically around mutual ethical concerns like welfare or poverty, creating liminal spaces of religious-secular interaction (Cloke, 2011a, 2015; Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Williams, 2015). Like Habermas's ideal-typical "complementary learning processes", postsecular rapprochements reflect and produce reflexive learning and mutual translation across religious-secular divides. Rather than as "universal, epochal shifts", however, they should be understood as organic flare-ups of relationships forged from shared feelings of indignation, although derived from diverse faith registers (Cloke et al., 2019; Cloke & Beaumont, 2013). According to Cloke and Beaumont, two transitions have enhanced the possibility of emerging rapprochements in the city. First is "the critique of fundamentalism within secularism" (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, p. 32). Second is "the move towards faith as praxis, rather than faith as dogma" (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, p. 32). Both, they contend, have enabled citizens to set aside their moral, theological or political values in order to come to common solutions.

An often cited example of postsecular rapprochement is "London Citizens" (LC) (Bretherton, 2011). LC is a community initiative in London which advocates a particular conceptualization of the 'good city' by bringing together a diverse array of organizations - religious players, universities, schools, trade

unions and community groups. Within LC, the synergy of FBOs and non-FBOs has cultivated "a genuinely postsecular space in which the religious, the secular and the postsecular enter into effective and democratic dialogue, releasing the potential of each component organization through collaboration and recognition of commonality and rights" (Herman, Beaumont, Cloke, & Walliser, 2012, p. 66).

1.3.3. Postsecularity

The hybrid condition of being produced by postsecular rapprochement is what these scholars call "postsecularity". Essentially, postsecularity is defined as "a thirdspace where the blurred boundaries between religious and secular belief, practice and identity can undergo reflexive engagement and produce new ethical and political subjectivities" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 21). Far from being yet another particularism or "identity in multiplicity", postsecularity entails a "becoming" of something that cannot be known in advance (Beaumont & Baker, 2011). As described by Cloke and colleagues, its characteristics "are not always intentionally scripted or designed, but are developed in situ, in relation with others, and shaped by a confluence of different ethical, theological and political flows and motivations" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 55). Postsecularity carries a progressive connotation and is believed to provide resistance "to the failings of government and excesses of secular modernism" (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, p. 46). It also comes in "dark" forms, however, apparent for instance "when strongly conservative religious and political discourses combine to construct political and ethical battlegrounds from which to oppose human rights" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 2).

1.3.4. Receptive generosity and theo-ethics

The last concept I discuss here is "receptive generosity", referring to an ethical disposition, religious or secular, which both reflects and generates postsecularity and rapprochement. Receptive generosity is characterized by an openness towards the Other wherein giving entails the ability to receive from others' specificity (Cloke, Johnsen, & May, 2005; Coles, 1997; Herman et al., 2012). Put differently, it is an "ethical stance towards others that is characterized by a deliberate forgoing of privilege position and agenda in order to pursue more reciprocal relationships" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 71). When informed theologically, such receptivity is referred to as "theo-ethics" (Cloke, 2010). Theo-ethics involve a commitment to love others as the personifications of God Himself. Due to their capacity to connect to analogous secular values like equality and justice, they are considered productive attitudes for entering postsecular learning processes and mutual translation. Spaces defined by receptive

generosity and theo-ethics in this respect are argued to renegotiate the religious/secular interface at various levels of society (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 73).

1.3.5. Critiques on the postsecular perspective of Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont

By turning the gaze towards the *potential* of faith-based motivation in combatting injustice, the postsecular strand within human geography has succeeded in standing up against the stubborn image of charity being essentially voluntaristic, paternalistic and ineffective. In doing so, it has opened a much-needed analytical space for studying relations between the secular, the sacred and the city (Graham, 2015, 2017). And yet, this perspective has not escaped scrutiny. Two main sets of critiques have been formulated by scholars working in the field of human geography and sociology.

Most notably, the perspective has been subject to criticism for its "naiveté" in portraying postsecularity and rapprochement as dynamics devoid from power asymmetries and mechanisms of exclusion (Lancione, 2014, p. 3065). On the one hand, it has been argued, FBOs and other spaces of religious-secular collaboration can never *only* be marked by crossovers revolving around hope and love. In this respect, Bolton provides a case in which an FBO's emancipatory agenda conflicts with the views of some of its volunteers, creating a power-dynamic of which homeless people become the victims (Bolton, 2015). FBOs, she concluded, are inevitably messy and ambivalent spaces marked by "multiple conflicting subjectivities and power disparities" (Bolton, 2015, p. 221). As such, they may fail in their aim to stand up for the socially excluded and resist neo-liberal logics. Likewise, Michele Lancione draws attention to the side effects of the "unconditional" love of the poor performed by Catholics in a homeless service in Turin. "Love", according to Lancione, "is always a condition: it is the condition through which a particular form and a particular content of care are abstracted and turned into sets of territorialised assemblages" (Lancione, 2013, p. 360). Rather than only providing a space for mutual learning and emancipation, in this respect, Lancione observed how Catholics' standardized services produced affective atmospheres that turned the homeless into passive subjects.

On the other hand, more so than merely being a "bubbling up of ethical values" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 3), postsecularity is argued to be enmeshed in and conditioned by relations of power. Its (non-)emergence is facilitated, obstructed or intersected by structures like asylum politics and gender regimes. This is well illustrated by the work of Patricia Ehrkamp and Caroline Nagel. Their study showed that Christian churches' hospitality to immigrants contributed to reinforcing structures of discrimination instead of opening up postsecular arenas of resistance. These churches were forced to operate under the radar, producing a politics of invisibility which did little to fundamentally change

the situation of immigrants (Ehrkamp & Nagel, 2014). A similar claim was made by Banu Gökarıksel and Anna Secor, whose work focuses on the everyday discourse and practice of devout Sunni women in Istanbul. These women, they observe, grapple with a pluralistic public sphere, having to navigate gendered moral orders which cut across public and private space. Their experiences illustrate not only the contingence of postsecularity upon multiple fields of power but also show how it may work as a field of power in itself. They write in this respect that "one does not, perhaps, arrive at post-secularism so much as one struggles with its demands" (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2015, p. 28). This is a point Elizabeth Olson and colleagues also make in their study on religious youth in Glasgow. The postsecular present, they observe, forces religious subjects to negotiate an ever expanding range of contesting connotations tied to their religious identities (Olson, Hopkins, Pain, et al., 2013, p. 1433).

This first set of critiques, in short, underscores that taking the normative ideal of a Habermasian postsecular society seriously also requires us to gain an understanding of the elements that *complicate* the realization of such an ideal. To that end, Stacey Butowski writes, we must examine "missed and not-yet realized opportunities as well as seized ones" (Gutkowski, 2014, p. 165). Others in this vein have encouraged future research to explore "the nuances of how, and on what terms, particular faith actors are entering specific public arenas" (Lonergan, Lewis, Tomalin, & Waite, 2021). Geographers themselves, too, are paying increasing attention to this issue. In their latest book, Cloke and colleagues call for a "sensitivity not only to power-relations but also to marginal experiences within practices of receptivity and rapprochement" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 206).

The second set of critiques revolves around the fact that the contours of these concepts remain embedded in an overly selective set of empirical cases. Lily Kong was among the first to state that this postsecular framework is not "a discourse that can be universally and evenly applied unproblematically" (Kong, 2010, pp. 764-765). Many of its assumptions specifically apply to European cities, creating a bias towards the West (Oosterbaan et al., 2019). Although growing efforts have been made to explore the configurations of postsecular rapprochement and postsecularity in other geo-political regions and relations, including rural regions (Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2017), horizontally organized social movements such as Occupy (Cloke, Sutherland, & Williams, 2016) and the Arab Spring (Barbato, 2020; Mavelli, 2012), and post-communist contexts (Havlíček & Klingorová, 2018), much work remains to be done.

This thesis responds to both of these critiques by focusing on a non-evident case, namely the historically marginal yet upcoming group of evangelical Christians and their emerging solidarities in

the Flemish welfare regime, which is arguably less marked by neo-liberalization than by disorganization (see chapter 2). In so doing, it challenges the tendency that concepts like postsecular rapprochement rely on research of long-established FBOs belonging to historical dominant religions, in particular protestant-evangelical organizations like the Salvation Army in traditionally protestant and neo-liberalized contexts such as the UK, the Netherlands or the US (e.g. Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Cloke, Thomas, & Williams, 2013; Williams, 2015). Given their long-standing experience and expertise in relating to established welfare organizations and institutions, I suggest, such FBOs make for the "obvious" cases in studying religious-secular relations. They might reproduce a rather one-sided image of postsecular rapprochement and its conditions and obscure the struggles and failures probably faced by younger faith traditions. What would postsecular rapprochement in the welfare context look like, by contrast, if we turned towards unexpected cases, like Evangelical Christian solidarities in the Flemish welfare regime? What would it teach us about its preconditions and possible articulations? In what way would it bring us closer to a Habermasian postsecular society?

1.4. Towards definitions and research questions

In this chapter I have justified adopting a postsecular perspective, contending that the concept carries an important performative force and provides valuable analytical devices. Considering the intricate variety of meanings contained in the postsecular concept, I have distinguished four dimensions in its usage. *Empirically*, I have argued, a postsecular context is eclectic in terms of faith dispositions and relations, enabled by a separation between religion and politics. *Epistemologically*, postsecular thinking entails letting go of strict binary epistemic structures, opting instead for an openness towards the potential of religion. *Political philosophically*, a postsecular society is a liberal democracy which reserves an active role for religions. *Analytically*, it serves as a lens through which to examine the co-assemblage of secular and religious discourse and praxis, potentially characterized by "postsecular rapprochement" and "postsecularity". In this thesis, the postsecular will be primarily used in the latter sense, namely as the analytical perspective inspired by Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont. By focusing on a historical minority religion in a non-Protestant context, it hopes to add to and complexify this perspective.

Adopting the postsecular as an analytical perspective does not exclude assuming the other dimensions, however. First, looking for "relations of possibility" (Beaumont & Baker, 2011, p. 2) between evangelical and secular actors presumes a context marked by multiple expressions of belief and non-belief. Second, expecting the religious and the secular to become co-assembled in new ways requires one to refrain from a priori viewing them as mutually exclusive. Third, adopting the analytical

perspective entails framing findings within the normative Habermasian postsecular society which underpins the perspective's tools.

By means of conclusion, the next sections will elaborate upon the working definitions of key concepts in this study, in particular "religion", "secularity", "solidarity", the "welfare state" and "welfare regimes", and articulate research questions.

1.4.1. Religion and secularity

Regarding the categories of religion and secularity, I align with the definitions put forth by Cloke and colleagues. "Religion", in this respect, is what relates a person or group to a transcendent order. Rather than from its institutional organization or apologetics, I will approach it from the way it is lived (see McGuire, 2008). "Secular", then, includes those lived worldviews and welfare grammars which do not relate to the transcendent or supernatural, such as secular humanism. Besides, it refers to the constitutional separation between public principle and private reason, the practical implementation of which varies depending on national context (Kuru, 2009; Modood, 2010). Arguably, the Belgian religion-state relationship in this respect leans towards a "moderate secularism" (Franken, 2016, p. 149 ; Modood & Sealy, 2022). In Belgium, "organized religion is treated as a potential public good or national resource (not just a private benefit), which the state can in some circumstances assist to realise" (Modood, 2010, p. 10). The Belgian state actively supports recognized religions - Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Anglicanism, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam, nonconfessional humanism and Buddhism. These religions get paid the salaries, pensions and housing of clergy and chaplains in hospitals and the army. They moreover enjoy subsidies for organizing religious courses in public and non-public schools, and receive free airtime on radio and television (see Torfs, 1996).

1.4.2. Solidarity and the welfare regime

I define solidarity as the sharing and distribution of material and/or immaterial resources (see Oosterlynck et al., 2016, p. 765). Solidarity may emanate from several sources - classically: "interdependence", "shared norms and values", "struggle" or "encounter" (Oosterlynck et al., 2016; Sangiovanni, 2015). It may be directed towards various objectives – for instance, realizing a personal interest that cannot be obtained without others, standing strong against a common adversary, creating community (Stjernø, 2011, p. 17). It may involve diverse levels of inclusivity – the family, the local community, a class, a nation, Europe, the world (Stjernø, 2011, p. 17). Rather than presuming a specific set of characteristics in this respect, I will adopt an inductive approach which allows for studying solidarities as they manifest in particular times and places.

The welfare state, from this perspective, emerges as just one articulation of solidarity, one institutionalized by the state on the basis of the rights and duties tied to national citizenship. More specifically, I conceive of the welfare state as "the complex of policies that, in one form or another, all rich democracies have adopted to ameliorate destitution and provide valued social goods and services" (as quoted in Fluit, 2024, p. 7; Hacker, 2005, p. 125). In practice, welfare states are characterized by amalgams of formal and informal partnerships and involve multiple individual and collective actors working at many scales (Pauly, Verschuere, & De Rynck, 2019, p. 4), with the center of gravity varying according to the type of welfare state – classically liberal, corporatist or social-democratic (Esping-Andersen, 1990). In order to better capture the multitude of actors, scales, resources, and forces involved, I will mostly use the term welfare "regime" rather than "state". Although the Belgian welfare regime involves both the redistribution of taxes on labor and capital, and the delivery of social services via civil society organizations, my primary focus will always be on the latter. Considering that this has historically become organized along the regional boundaries of Flanders and Wallonia, I will moreover mostly speak of the "Flemish" rather than the "Belgian" welfare regime.

1.4.3. Research goal

In short, the aim of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding in the roles of Evangelical Christian solidarities in the Flemish welfare regime from a postsecular perspective. This objective comes down to the following central questions

- How do evangelical and secular welfare grammars co-produce each other in the Flemish welfare regime?
  - In particular, how do evangelical actors engage with secular ethics, subjects and practices in shaping their solidarities?
  - (How) do evangelicals translate their language in their interaction with formal welfare instances?
  - (How) does any postsecular rapprochement take place between evangelical welfare actors and (in)formal actors of other faith?
  - (How) does any postsecular rapprochement take place among evangelical givers and non-evangelical receivers within evangelical welfare initiatives?

The main task arising from this set of questions is to shed light on the way in which a particular evangelical solidarity is constituted in relation to the welfare regime, and to do so with particular attention to religious-secular interaction patterns. I will do so in an inductive manner, avoiding to predefine both the religious and the secular welfare grammars in question. This will result in an open-ended typology of five interaction schemes between evangelical welfare actors and their secular(ized) welfare context beyond postsecular rapprochement. These will include: "Stretched postsecular rapprochement", "parallel moral economies", "semiotic guerrilla warfare", "pragmatic rapprochement" and "subversive love of neighbor". Each of them will form a chapter in the second part of this thesis. The first part will proceed with justifying my choice to take the Flemish evangelical and welfare landscape as cases and with discussing my methodology.

Chapter 2: A history of the Flemish welfare landscape and the position of Evangelical Christianity

2.1. A history of religion in the Flemish welfare landscape: The subsidiarity paradox

As elsewhere, welfare and religion have always been intimately intertwined on the Flemish territory. This section sketches the Flemish welfare landscape since the late 19th century with a special focus on the enduring yet changed role of religious traditions, both in providing services and in drawing out the structures for doing so. Concurrently, it offers a window through which to understand the modern-day Flemish welfare arena as a context whose peculiarities create exceptional opportunities for welfare subjects of different faith to get in touch with each other and potentially engage in postsecular rapprochements. Most notably, I will suggest, this owes to the strong foothold of the subsidiarity principle. Although initially implemented as an instrument of catholic control, subsidiarity ended up producing a rich civil society accommodating voices of different faith. I will refer to this phenomenon as the "subsidiarity paradox".

Over the last two decades, historians and social scientists have increasingly introduced religion as a co-constitutive factor in the formation of welfare states, thus complicating the traditional narrative that views them primarily as the result of working-class rebellion against the excesses of capitalism and political elitism (Esping-Andersen & Van Kersbergen, 1992). Most notably, it was Kees van Kersbergen who underscored the considerable significance of Christian Democracy in patterning social policy reform (Van Kersbergen, 2003; Van Kersbergen & Manow, 2009). In line with Esping Andersen's classic power resources approach, Van Kersbergen defined welfare regimes as "formulas of political compromise between different electoral and societal groups", including religiously-inspired ones (Manow & Van Kersbergen, 2009, p. 33). This statement was built upon by others, including Sigrun Kahl who stressed the influence of the religious message itself (Kahl, 2009). Religious doctrines and principles, she argued, have continued to underpin countries' political cultures and their secularized institutions, offering a common footing for establishing political consensus.

In elaborating this section, I will largely draw upon this body of literature that brings religion in the picture of welfare state history (for a thorough literature overview, see Fluit, 2024, pp. 7-13). The aim, however, is not to offer an exhaustive overview, let alone an explanation, of the myriad elements which in their interplay have formed the intricate assemblage called "the welfare state". Rather, it is to shed light on the hybridity of what is often still considered a strictly secular arrangement, to provide a context sufficient for embedding and situating the subsequent case studies and, above all, to justify

the Flemish welfare landscape as a promising context for the application of the postsecular perspective specified in the previous chapter.

Although Catholic charity has been prevalent in Flanders since the Middle Ages, I will commence my argument in the wake of Belgium's battle for independence, an era marked by a Catholic revival. First, I will explore the social project pursued by Catholic governments from the late 19th century to World War I which gave shape to the principle of subsidiarity and planted the seeds of the pillarized structure that took real root in the interbellum. Second, I look at pillarization as a means of governing confessional difference. Third, I touch upon the 1944 "Social Pact", asking whether this compromise could be considered a postsecular rapprochement. Finally, I discuss the gradual dissolving of the pillars from the 1960s onwards and the evolution towards a so-called "disorganized" welfare regime, which has opened up a space for the activities of new (religious) actors. This will eventually offer me an entry for introducing Evangelical Christianity as a new player in the Flemish welfare arena.

2.1.1. 1884-1921: A Catholic social project

In the aftermath of Belgian independence (1831), Catholics were the first to capitalize on the freedoms provided by the progressive constitution by intensifying their commitment to the laity and adopting a more open stance to popular piety (Van Osselaer, 2012). Those years accordingly witnessed a Catholic réveil, marked by a remarkable revival of private charity initiatives (Lamberts, 1998; van Molle, 2017). This so-called "empire by invitation" (Viaene, 2001) enabled Catholics to preserve their religious and cultural monopoly along with their intimate relationship with the state, which was of particular urgency in the face of encroaching liberalism and socialism. As the 19th century progressed, however, paternalistic charity proved inadequate in providing a satisfying answer to the poor working conditions faced by the lowest classes, and hence to the looming threat of socialism. All over Europe, the social question forced leading Catholics to start pondering new ways of organizing society in a Christian manner (Canavero, Wilhelm, & Claudia, 2005). Gradually, their long sought third way between liberalism and socialism would come to coherence in a utopian model embodied by corporatism.

From 1884 until World War I, the Belgian government remained under the control of conservative Catholics almost incessantly. This granted them an exceptional opportunity to shape and implement their Christian social project, which would leave a long-term mark on the Belgian political and social landscape (van Molle, 2017; Vanthemsche, 1994). Most notably, this project envisaged a stratified and deeply Christian society which relied on social harmony and solidarity yet differentiation and hierarchy between the classes –the urban working proletariat, the farmers and the bourgeoisie were explicitly

distinguished and targeted. At its foundation was an onto-theological model inspired by Thomas Aquinas (Deferme, 2007), rooted in the axiom that every creature is essentially divine and therefore bound to behave in accordance with its divine destiny. Following this model, the human understanding of the rules of God's established order, i.e. the "natural law", should provide the moral guidance for the actions of any individual as well as for the laws, norms and values of any society. A society, in this regard, is deemed just only when it adheres to the conditions of the ontologically divine order, and therefore asserts the natural rights of all.

This neo-Thomist vision was officially formulated in the papal encyclical Rerum Novarum (1891) which was to provide an answer to socialism by stressing the natural rights of individuals and the family over the state (Moeys, 2017) and advocating thrift, private property and family values (Vanthemsche, 1994). Charity, it stated, was not a duty of justice, but of Christian love of neighbor and should, consequently, not be enforceable by law. Despite this and the fact that it glorified poverty, Rerum Novarum did express the need to provide structural solutions for the working class. After all, it argued, the miserable condition of proletarians was disproportionate to what they were due by nature. The concretization of this big step taken in Catholic thought took shape in the ambivalent principle of subsidiarity, which would leave a long-lasting imprint on the coordination of welfare in Flanders and, as I will argue, would form an important impetus behind the emergence of a context fruitful for postsecular rapprochements.

The principle of subsidiarity was defined by historian Hendrik Moeys as a form of freedom in which "higher levels of authority should leave as much as possible to their lower counterparts or free initiatives (negative notion), even though they have a right and a duty to support them (positive notion)" (Moeys, 2017, p. 27). Although the Church would expound the principle more extensively forty years later in the encyclical Quadragessimo Anno (1931), its preliminary description in Rerum Novarum already yielded a strong influence in Belgium, especially through its circulation in Germany and Austria (Canavero et al., 2005). In 1894, Catholics put the idea of subsidiarity (also called subsidized liberty) into practice in a new Belgian law that regulated the government's recognition of societies for mutual aid in case of misfortune, sickness, birth and death. As suggested by historian Guy Vantemsche, the implementation of this law essentially was a conservative strategy aimed at controlling the field of social welfare by strengthening and expanding the then already dense network of Catholic mutualities at the expense of (the then less elaborated) socialist ones (Vanthemsche, 1994, p. 19). From a Catholic point of view, the principle of subsidiarity thus allowed for the construction of a close-knit fabric of associations, bringing to life the ideal of a deeply Christian corporatist society

in times of industrialization, state centralization and democratization (Lamberts, 1998). Soon, however, it would become apparent that socialists and liberals would benefit from the principle as well and gradually build their own "societies-in-a-society" or pillars (Vanderstraeten, 2002, p. 133).

2.1.2. 1921-1944: Pillarization and the Social Pact

By the end of World War I, political configurations had somewhat changed. Partly due to the introduction of universal male suffrage, Catholics now found themselves compelled to share their presence in the government with socialists (1921). As argued by Patrick Pasture, this predicament could easily have led to a political deadlock in the development of social welfare. And yet, he states, "subsidized liberty offered a way to achieve social progress in a short time" (Pasture, 2005). In this period, the battle over welfare – and, as Staf Hellemans contends, over Modernity in general (Hellemans, 1990) – unfolded with even greater intensity on the terrain of civil society, resulting in the emergence of extensive organizational clusters operating under the umbrella of a political party, later called "pillars". In Belgium, three pillars emerged; a Catholic, a socialist and to a lesser extend a liberal pillar. In the decades to come, these pillars would significantly set the contours of the Belgian political and social landscape, as well as of the lives of their members (this was especially the case for the lowest and middle classes). "From the cradle to the grave", so it is told, citizens were supposed to dedicate their time to the pillar they belonged to, from the youth movement to the trade union, the health insurance association and the magazines they read (Van Doorn, 1956).

At this point, it is hard to imagine that such a segregated welfare landscape would later become a fertile ground for the emergence of postsecular partnerships. On the one hand, subsidized liberty did encourage the emergence of a so-called "mixed economy of welfare" in which the task of care is performed by a diverse mix of actors (Moeys, 2017). On the other, rather than enabling crossovers, this mix was organized along strict ideological lines, resulting in "the creation of separate worlds" (Hellemans, 2020; Huyse, 1987, p. 17). Pillarization indeed has been considered a pacification mechanism regulating and neutralizing conflict across deep-cut cleavages by keeping clashing groups apart (Huyse, 1987; Lijphart, 2008). The interbellum settlement, in this respect, can be considered a typical "organized welfare mix", the regulation of which took shape via strong, solidified, consociational public-private ties (Bode, 2006; Hustinx, Verschuere, & De Corte, 2014). Such mix is distinguished by three features. First, the provision of welfare is orchestrated through formalized, long-established public-private partnerships blurring public-private boundaries. Secondly, civil society organizations actively engage in the governance of social services resulting in a "system wide coordination through agreements about problems, means and responsibilities" (Bode, 2006, p. 349).

Finally, it relies to a large extend on trust, long-term commitment and (often uncritical) loyalty of the stakeholders of organizations (Bode, 2006, p. 349). Such configuration did not facilitate easy contact between welfare providers and -users of different faith. However, it did demand continuous alignment and coordination between the pillars on higher levels.

The 1944 Social Pact, which contained the blueprint of postwar social insurance, is often seen as the result of such deliberate consultation. The pact organized the protection of wage-earners from material insecurity, based on the principle of solidarity. In retrospect, this moment is widely thought of as the triumph of secular, universal social welfare over (religious) charity. Yet, as suggested by historian Guy Vantemsche and others (Pasture, 2005; Vanthemsche, 1994), this view misses out on two important facts. First, the discussions about a compulsory system trace back to long before the Second World War – voluntary insurance schemes were already widespread then (Heyrman, Coussement, & Vercruysse, 2019). Secondly, there has never been a real consensus between the many parties involved. The pact was concluded under the pressure of high distress after WWII and was supposed to be temporary. According to Patrick Pasture, "the sometimes virulent dispute lasted until in the early 1960s the basic tenets of the 1944 decree were confirmed by the law" (Pasture, 2005, p. 274). Thus, starting from scholarly literature, one cannot speak of any postsecular rapprochement here, nor from a spilling over of different faith values. However, it can be argued that the result of this pact was in some way a liminal arrangement combining various visions and voices, including religious ones. For instance, whereas the 1944 social security system was compulsory (as aimed for by socialists in particular), it was set apart from a fully "étatist" social protection system via the significant role of private initiatives – unions, employers organizations, mutual insurance companies (as the patronage and Christian Democrat interest groups strived for). Thus, the Belgian welfare state is classically categorized as a "conservative continental welfare state" (Esping-Andersen, 1990), characterized by complex public-private partnerships and fragmented social insurance schemes, running largely along ideological, vocational and gender lines. Because of the persistent importance of the subsidiarity principle, the pillars and the welfare state would become intensely intertwined and mutually reinforcing in the following years.

2.1.3. 1960 – now: Towards a disorganized welfare mix

While the prosperous "trente glorieuses" (1950s-1970s) initially saw a flourishing of consociationalism, pillarization and, in particular, Christian Democracy (Jones, 2002; Pasture, 2005), the 1960s marked a turning point in the determining force of the pillars. By the time the phenomenon of pillarization was given a name, it was falling prey to ideological erosion, as symbolized and incited

by the Church's 1962 Aggiornamento to the modern world (Dobbelaere & Voyé, 1990; Huyse, 1987). In Belgium, unlike the Netherlands, organizational structures largely remained intact. How come? A first explanation was sought in the so-called "surrogate hypothesis", which holds that the strong ideological character of the pillars was gradually replaced by a more general and widely supported value framework (Billiet, 2004; Billiet & Dobbelaere, 1976). Thus, the catholic pillar evolved from "a Catholicism of the Church" to a "socio-cultural Christianity" propagating widely held values, such as love, justice and solidarity. Secondly, scholars have pointed to the material benefits and services the pillars offered their members or, rather, their "clients" (Van Den Bulck, 1992). The pillars, according to sociologist Luc Huyse, became "political concerns" entering into contracts with the state for their services (Huyse, 1987). Thirdly, and highly interconnected, is the entwinement of the pillars and the welfare state through the principle of subsidiarity. This arrangement arguably led to the institutionalization (as well as the professionalization and secularization) of the pillars (Billiet & Huyse, 1984).

From the late 1970s onwards, the coupling between the pillars and their parties, as well as the boundaries between the pillars themselves, further loosened (Hooghe, 1999; Vanderstraeten, 2002). New social movements, including environmental, feminist and pacification groups, challenged the state of affairs and set new topics on the agenda. Moreover, as the North African guest workers recruited by Belgium in the 1960s turned out to be settling for the long term with their families, small-scale though not untrivial networks of socio-cultural organizations and mosques began to develop alongside traditional pillarized structures (Kanmaz, 2007). Notwithstanding a handful of pleas in favor of it (Neudt & Zarhoni, 2002), these networks would never mature into an Islamic pillar. According to Staf Hellemans, this was mainly owing to their lack of internal coherence and a policy which was geared towards their integration rather than segregation (Hellemans, 2020, p. 135).

Most notably, however, it was the emergence of "new social risks" spurred by a range of social, economic and demographic evolutions that put a strain on the nation state, the post war welfare settlement and its corporatist/pillarized mode of governance tout court. Adding to the old risks of illness, unemployment, disability, and old age, new social risks produced new types of precarity hitting different segments of the population (Ranci, 2010; Rosanvallon, 2015). These risks, which included long-term unemployment, an altered work-life balance and the insufficiency of single incomes in a dual-earner society, led welfare regimes including the Belgian to gradually restructure and further de-centralize (Cantillon & Van Mechelen, 2014).

Rather than following the hegemonic narrative that interprets this change in terms of "crisis", "retrenchment", or "withdrawal" of the welfare state due to neoliberalization, I align with those who understand it as a transformation owing to a *mix* of forces (Göçmen, 2013; Romanillos, Beaumont, & Şen, 2012). Thus, while I agree with Paul Cloke and colleagues that European welfare regimes have become fruitful contexts for postsecular rapprochements, I will not attribute this to hardline neoliberalization in the case of Belgium, which has arguably been marked more by "creeping marketization" (Bode, 2011). Unlike Anglosaxon contexts, the Belgian has never been devoid of a tradition of public-private partnerships. What has changed is not the fact that they are there, but *how* (Bode, 2006, p. 348). Following Ingo Bode's observation of the German context, I will suggest that the public-private partnerships coordinating the Belgian welfare regime have shifted from "organized" or "corporatist" towards "disorganized" or "postcorporatist". It is this state of disorganization which I will consider a conducive soil for the emergence of postsecular rapprochements. The next sections will discuss what is meant by a disorganized welfare mix and elaborate upon the persistent implementation of the subsidiarity principle undergirding it; the so-called "subsidiarization" of social policy (Kazepov, 2008, 2010).

2.1.4. Disorganized welfare mix?

When scholars argue that the governance of welfare in Belgium has become "disorganized" or "post-corporatist", they mean that "long-established patterns of a system-wide coordination via negotiated public-private partnerships [have] turn[ed] into volatile and heterogeneous configurations" (Bode, 2006, p. 347; also Hustinx & De Waele, 2015; Hustinx et al., 2014; Suykens, De Rynck, & Verschuere, 2020). Put differently, they state that the governance of welfare has become marked by a more relaxed form of corporatism in which the long-standing ties between civil society organizations, parties, mutual aid organizations and voters have eroded over time, making room for new public-private partnerships across ideological lines. This situation, Bode contends, entails "more precarious, but also more dynamic interrelations" between civil society and welfare state institutions (Bode, 2006, p. 347). It moreover results in civil action being "fluid, sporadic, dispersed but also creative in many places" (Bode, 2006, p. 354).

One way to explain this disorganization is by what Yuri Kazepov has called the "subsidiarization" of social policy (Kazepov, 2008, 2010). Subsidiarization refers to the combined effect of two separate yet entangled reform processes, both attempts to meet the structural changes undermining welfare regimes. On the one hand, Kazepov observes, European countries have seen a territorial decentralization of social policy (*vertical subsidiarization*), in which responsibilities and resources shifted

to the European Union and its common market as well as to the subnational level (Oosterlynck et al., 2013, p. 4). The increased focus on the local level has been backed by three arguments: it is deemed more effective, more democratic and more sustainable (Andreotti, Mingione, & Polizzi, 2012). On the other hand, awareness of the multifaceted nature of social problems has led to social policies relying on a more diverse array of actors for the production and delivery of social services, including public, private, for-profit, not-for-profit organizations, civil society organizations and individuals (*horizontal subsidiarization*) (also Ascoli & Ranci, 2013).

In Belgium, vertical subsidiarization has been closely tied to a series of state reforms (1970-2011), involving the gradual transfer of competencies, money and people from the central to the regional and community level. It was epitomized, moreover, by the introduction of the Public Centres for Social Welfare (OCMWs) in 1976, which were expected to be present in every town and municipality. Regarded as the capstones of welfare state development, OCMWs were tasked with guaranteeing the social rights of all citizens and ensuring everyone could live their lives consistent with human dignity (Vanhercke & Vranken, 1998). Since the 1990s, however, OCMWs have come to be viewed as effective tools in responsibilizing citizens (Raeymaeckers, Vermeiren, & Coene, 2018). Their focus on rights has been complemented by a growing emphasis on duties, prompting them to "activate" their beneficiaries towards the labor market (Raeymaeckers, Leibetseder, Fluder, Gubrium, & Dierckx, 2017; Vandenbroucke, 1999). In this spirit, successive decrees and instruments have encouraged further vertical subsidiarization of social policy in Flanders, enhancing the role of OCMWs and other local (semi-)governmental bodies such as the Centers for General Wellbeing (CAWs).

In tandem, social policy in Flanders has undergone horizontal subsidiarization, leading to "localized mixed networks of public institutions and a host of (new or less established) civil society organizations" (Oosterlynck et al., 2015, p. 14). These mixes combine various worldviews, skills, resources and tools to intervene at the local level in complex social problems. In 2019, for instance, a new Decree on Local Social Policy was accepted in Flanders which was explicitly geared towards maximizing the realization of fundamental social rights via interorganizational collaboration (Boost, Raeymaeckers, Hermans, & Elloukmani, 2021, p. 5). Most notably, this decree advances the idea of "Integrated Rights-Practices" (GBO), a joint venture between every municipality's OCMW, CAW and Health Insurance agencies to obtain alignment and cooperation in the provision of services.

Taken together, the once close and long-standing partnerships which defined the corporatist and pillarized mode of governance are now argued to be in "a permanent state of disorganization"

(Hustinx & De Waele, 2015, p. 1669). Inherent to this situation, Bode concludes, is a paradox: disorganized welfare mixes yield systematic organizational failure and permanent creativity all at once (also Andreotti et al., 2012; Kazepov, 2010). While facing the risks of territorial fragmentation, conflict, and a loss of control on the part of governments, they also forge innovative articulations between diverse actors and their various worldviews. They "open up" the welfare mix to unconventional welfare players (Oosterlynck et al., 2015, p. 14), "transforming the local level into a social laboratory" (Andreotti et al., 2012, p. 66; Kazepov, 2010, p. 66). This precarious yet exciting scenario is where the renewed role and relevance of (new) religious players comes in.

2.1.5. New religious players

As of the 1960s, indeed, Catholic church adherence saw a significant decline (Dobbelaere, Voyé, Billiet, & Abts, 2011). Meanwhile, new religious traditions and movements entered the Flemish scene, driven by intricate dynamics of globalization and immigration. The largest, most publicly visible and politicized among them has been Islam, which formally obtained recognition in 1974. Additionally, Eastern traditions including Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism experienced considerable growth, the latter of which was recognized by the Belgian government only in 2023. The same is true for Evangelical Christian and Pentecostal denominations, some of which were officially recognized in 2003.

Many of these faith communities engage in localized practices of solidarity and should thus be considered intrinsic parts of the welfare landscape (Dierckx, Kerstens, et al., 2009). Amongst others, they function as arrival structures for newcomers (Kanmaz, 2007; Meeus & Schillebeeckx, 2015), shelter undocumented people (Schrooten & Trappers, 2019), detect changing needs (S. Van Dam et al., 2022) and perform as a bridge towards formal instances (Moris & Maes, 2022). In so doing, they possess the potential to reprise their historical role, be it now amidst a diverse array of other actors. Disorganized welfare mixes in this respect present a promising scenario for welfare subjects (givers, receivers, organizations, governments) of different faith to get in touch with each other, coalesce around mutual ethical concerns and potentially create crossover practices and narratives.

Several obstacles have complicated this scenario, however. Most notably, collaborations are hindered by mutual prejudices and a lack of mutual awareness (Maes, Broeckaert, Raeymaeckers, & Schrooten, 2023; Moris, Maes, Van Wymeersch, Schrooten, & Raeymaeckers, 2022). Faith based actors, on the one hand, express concerns about being unable to fully live out their faith and use their own faith language in relation to formal bodies (Maes, Broeckaert, et al., 2023). Formal welfare organizations

and institutions, on the other, worry that cooperation with faith actors would evoke a return to times when the poor would sell their souls for a bowl of soup (S. Van Dam et al., 2022), and that they would "strengthen power hierarchies based on gender and sexual orientation" (Trappers & Schrooten, 2019, p. 104).

The presence of these hurdles, however, should not prevent us from further examining the role of faith-based solidarities in the Flemish welfare landscape. This thesis turns the gaze specifically towards solidarities informed by Evangelical Christian belief. As I will discuss in the second part of this chapter, a lot is moving in the Flemish Evangelical landscape. I will suggest that there are reasons to assume that even these traditionally fundamentalist and self-contained communities may be willing, able or forced to engage in interaction with their local welfare environment and take up roles in disorganized welfare mixes.

2.1.6. Conclusion

In this section, I have provided a bird's eye view of the Flemish welfare landscape with a special focus on the role of religious actors. My main goal was to point to the following paradox: whereas the principle of subsidiarity was initially installed as a Catholic mechanism of control in times of progressive modernization, its further implementation has provided fruitful conditions for the emergence of cross-faith interactions and potential postsecular rapprochements. The following chapters will explore how this hypothesis plays out in practice. First, let us zoom in on the history and contours of the Evangelical Christian (welfare) landscape in Flanders.

2.2. Evangelical Christianity in Flanders

2.2.1. Intro

This section will suggest that, despite their association with fundamentalism, evangelical solidarities make promising cases from the perspective of postsecular rapprochement. My reasoning behind this proposition is twofold: First, there is an observable trend among older, mostly Dutch-speaking evangelical communities towards reflexivity and openness, translating in a stronger emphasis on charitable praxis. Secondly, a growing group of evangelical migrant communities adheres to a here-and-now theology and functions as pivotal arrival structures for newcomers.

In formulating this suggestion, I will draw upon the remarkably scarce and fragmented body of literature that focuses on Flemish evangelicalism. Up to now, much of the engagement with Flemish

evangelicalism has been conducted at a non-academic level (e.g. Blokland, 2016, 2023; Laan & Laan, 1982; Valkenburg, 1975). The first thorough academic studies did not emerge until the 21st century, most notably in the fields of history, sociology, and theology. Much remains left exploring, including the largely uncharted realm of evangelical-inspired solidarity.

In what follows, I will paint the Flemish evangelical (solidarity) landscape by means of a historical overview which breaks down Flemish evangelicalism into two segments, namely an older, Dutch-speaking segment, and a newer group of churches with a migration background. As for the first group, I adopt the phases in the history of Flemish evangelicalism discerned by Pieter Boersema (Boersema, 2004). The first phase spans from 1912 to the early 1970s and witnessed the planting of the pioneering churches. The second (1970s-1990s) was marked by a strict focus on conversionism as well as a decline of catholic church attendance, which was accompanied by a growing evangelical adherence and a stronger self-consciousness. During the third (1990s-now), evangelical churches fell prey to the same secularizing forces as Catholicism, and their former missionary tactics no longer paid off. This phase, then, is characterized by a reevaluation of these tactics and implied a shift from "faith-by dogma" to "faith-by-praxis". The second group consists of the so-called "migrant churches". This group has started to mushroom in the third phase of the first group, spurred by migration from Eastern Europe, Asia, South America and Sub Sahara Africa. It has been actively engaged in assisting the destitute, arguably underpinned by a theological shift towards the here-and-now. Before addressing these developments in more detail, I clarify my definition of evangelical Christianity.

2.2.2. Evangelical Christianity?

"In every generation, from the eighteenth century to the present, evangelical identity has been contested", assert theologians Andrew Atherstone and David Jones (Atherstone & Jones, 2018, p. 19). This raises the following question: Can we even speak of such thing as "the Evangelical Movement"? In order to gain a clearer understanding of evangelical Christianity, we must rewind to its origins, which ultimately trace back to the Reformation in 16th century Europe. Offering an entire history of Protestantism is beyond my scope, but evangelicals share its basic principles (the five Sola's), most notably the emphasis on an individual relationship with God rather than one mediated by church structures. Considerable disagreement exists as to when exactly and on what points evangelicals diverged from mainline protestants. According to David Bebbington, a leading figure in the historiography of evangelicalism, this divergence took place during the 18th century as a result of the revitalization of Protestantism in Great Britain and its colonies (Bebbington, 2017). One evening in May 1738, a life transforming conversion experience hit the Englishman John Wesley, just around the

time when a Welshman named George Whitefield was struck by a similar revelation. Both started to proclaim their eye-opening encounters throughout Britain and soon, conversions spread like wildfire. Analogous trends unfolded in the American colonies, collectively referred to as the first Great Awakening (Ward, 2002).

It was only by the end of the 19th century with the advance of liberalism within Protestantism that Evangelicals became more readily distinguishable from Protestants (Prins, 2015). As liberal theology moved away from dogmatic interpretations of the Bible, instead opening a space for its critical and literary interpretation, liberalism became the main marker of Evangelical self-differentiation. In contrast to liberals, Evangelicals would claim to stick to the Truth by staying close to Christianity's roots. In a recent publication, a prominent figure in today's Belgian evangelical landscape expresses this as follows: "We want to see ourselves as the heirs of the Reformation who broke free from dogmatic institutional chains. But while the Reformation sank into a liberalism with neo-institutional traits, we clung to Biblical truth. Evangelical Protestants, as we like to call ourselves, are Reformed reformers" (Zander, 2021, p. 64). The term "fundamentalism" is commonly employed to define evangelicals' resistance against theological liberalism. Originating from a series of twelve booklets named The Fundamentals, published between 1915 and 1920, which documented evangelical beliefs and complaints (Abrams, 2001), "fundamentalism" conveyed a literalistic reading of the Bible, adherence to Biblical infallibility, and traditional gender ideology. Historically, this inclination has also been reflected in a commitment on conversionism rather than on social justice. Whereas liberal protestants traditionally adhere to a "social gospel", displaying a strong engagement in social action and care also to non-Christians, evangelicals deliberately abstained from such pursuits (Cloke et al., 2005, p. 389).

And yet, it is argued, to equate evangelicalism with fundamentalism is reductionist, considering the wide variety in evangelical opposition to liberalism (Prins, 2015, p. 9). The evangelical spectrum embraces numerous currents and denominations, all with slightly different viewpoints and emphases. Amongst others, the first Great Awakening in the early 18th century formed the impetus behind (Wesleyan) Methodism, Presbyterianism and Baptism in the Anglo-Saxon world. The second Awakening a century later gave rise to Adventism and Dispensationalism in the US. The 1906 Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles then is commonly seen as the birth of Pentecostalism, in turn generating an expansion of charismatic evangelical church communities all over the globe. Thus, to speak about a singular Evangelical Movement does not fit the bill. Rather, it is suggested, we could refer to several "evangelicalisms" (Atherstone & Jones, 2018).

The question, however, remains: what exactly ties these evangelicalisms together? Innumerable endeavors have been made to capture the essence of the Evangelical Movement, the most widely accepted among which has become Bebbington's quadrilateral (Bebbington, 2003). For Bebbington, evangelicalism is characterized by four essential features: conversionism (accepting the importance of personal conversion), Biblicism (approving the Bible as God's Word), crucicentrism (placing Christ's death on the cross at the center of the salvation message), and activism (spreading the Message). While the quadrilateral is argued to apply to Evangelicals in Flanders (Creemers, 2017; De Cavel, 2020), I agree with the critique that these elements remain too flexible, making it difficult to exclude for instance Roman Catholics and liberal Protestants (Larsen, 2007). In this research, therefore, I adopt the proposition of historian Timothy Larsen that a church or organization is evangelical when it "stands in the tradition of the global Christian networks arising from the eighteenth century revival movements associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield" (Larsen, 2007, p. 1). In practice, this involves a great emphasis is put on the individual experience of the Holy Spirit.

The following section will sketch the history of the first group of evangelical communities in Flanders, which I divide into three phases. Given its close entanglement with Protestant history more generally, I begin by providing a very brief outline of the latter.

2.2.3. Post-war evangelicalism

2.2.3.1. The first phase: Pioneering and church planting (1912-1968)

Protestantism has a longstanding history on Flemish soil. After facing near extinction during the Counter Reformation in the late 16th century, it experienced a gradual growth fueled by increased religious liberty under French (1795-1815) and Dutch rule (1815-1830) as well as Belgium's liberal constitution (1830). As a consequence of the Napoleontic regime, Protestantism was already officially recognized by the Belgian government at the moment of its independence (Godwin, 2013a). In 1839, therefore, a protestant union was established as the state interlocutor, initially representing only 16 churches, a few of which received state funding. Later, this union evolved into the United Protestant Church in Belgium (VPKB), which it has remained ever since. In Belgium today, this status of recognition enables receiving active support for Protestant activities such as the organization of religious education in public schools. It also permits second-order recognition of local churches, providing ministers with a salary and pension from the state (see Torfs, 1996). Currently, it is estimated, Protestants make up close to two per cent of the population (Godwin, 2013b).

Evangelicals were not yet in the picture at the time of Belgian independence. It was only after World War I that their emergence gained traction with the arrival of Evangelical and Pentecostal missionaries (Nullens, 2010). Prominent in this respect was the American missionary couple Ralph and Edith Norton, who had engaged in evangelizing among Belgian soldiers in London during the war and went on to establish the Belgian Gospel Mission (BGM). In the years to come, the BGM would become a driving force behind the foundation of new churches all over Belgium, including Brussels, Bruges, Antwerp and Ghent (Prins, 2015). This period also witnessed the planting of the first Pentecostal churches by Dutch and North American missionaries, initially in Antwerp and subsequently in other cities (Demaerel, 1990; Godwin, 2013b; Van Der Laan, 2011).

Rather than on ecumene or social action, these pioneering churches were centered on evangelism and church planting. This could be accounted for by their underdog position in a welfare regime largely occupied by Catholics, and their strong opposition towards liberal protestants who were active in the Belgian field of social care as well, for instance through the Salvation Army (Nullens, 2016). It was, moreover, tied to the peculiarity of the post-war period, which was marked by the establishment of the state of Israel and the cold war, both interpreted as signs of Biblical eschatology (Blokland, 2016). In this evangelistic spirit, the BGM soon (1962) established the "Vrije Evangelische Gemeenten" (VEG) as an independent association for local churches capable of governing themselves. While this development primarily allowed the BGM to devote itself and its US money entirely to proselytizing, it also represented a first important step towards a real Flemish evangelical framework.

2.2.3.2. The second phase: Growing self-consciousness (1968-1989)

The year 1968 was marked by Boersema as the beginning of a new phase in Flemish evangelicalism (2004, p. 28). In his view, that year heralded a social and cultural turnaround which led evangelicals to become more self-conscious. First, the movement grew significantly in number after the 1970s. New denominations took root, most notably the Brethren-like churches in 1971 under influence of Canadian Missionaries. This initially informal movement would later become the "Evangelische Christengemeenten Vlaanderen" (ECV), as is well described in Thomas Marinello's work (Marinello, 2013). Several churches were also planted of Swiss, Dutch and French signature, while partnerships between Pentecostal churches intensified. Finally, all of these churches increasingly capitalized on the decline in Roman Catholic membership. All too often, evangelicals were apostate Catholics, seeking a deeper and more personal experience of faith. Arguably, the nascent evangelical movement became a rival to the established Catholic Church in the 1970s and 1980s.

Secondly, although this was not necessarily accompanied by a surge in public exposure and while remaining strongly influenced by Anglo-Saxon preachers, the growth caused Flemish evangelicals to take a stronger stance. This confidence was exemplified, amongst others, by the establishment of the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven (ETF) (1981) and the rise of the "Goede Boek" bookstores (1973). Most notably, however, it led them to condemn the perceived "monopoly on religion-state relations held by "liberal" Protestants" of the VPKB, especially in the domain of religious education, and claim their share (Creemers, 2017, p. 280).

2.2.3.3. The third phase (1989-now): Institutionalization and reflection

As of 1985, a long institutionalization process was initiated in negotiation with the VPKB and the State. The process commenced when the Flemish Evangelical Alliance (EAV), a platform comprising members from a range of Pentecostal and evangelical denominations, took a stance against the overly liberal overtones of protestant religious education in public schools. This platform would soon evolve to represent and defend Evangelical Christians towards the state in all important matters (1988-1989)(Creemers, 2017). The process reached a critical juncture when several evangelical denominations were included in the "list of cults" set up by the Belgian government (1997). This stigmatizing list prompted evangelicals to assert their identity as legitimate Protestants in the face of both the government and the population at large (Godwin, 2013a). In 1998, the EAV eventually evolved into the "Federal Synod" (FS), which became the official representative body of Evangelical Christianity in Belgium.

The FS comprised several evangelical denominations, including the ECV and the VEG, as well as several umbrella organizations, such as the Alliance of Flemish Pentecostal churches (VVP). Along with the VPKB, the FS was integrated into an overarching representative entity called the "Administrative Council of the Protestant and Evangelical Religion" (ARPEE). As this body started its function in 2003, evangelicals were allowed to provide evangelical education in schools, and individual churches belonging to the set of recognized denominations could become recognized and funded. Still, it is essential to note the unusual nature of this development among Evangelicals, known for their strong attachment to freedom and their resistance to any form of mutual accountability. Jelle Creemers emphasizes that this process of structural unification did not emanate from an inner evangelical desire for official status. Rather, he argues, it should be understood from their historical relation to liberals, namely as "a battle for orthodoxy" (Creemers, 2017, p. 276). Arguably, this explains why so many denominations and individual churches deliberately choose not to join the FS and remain

fully independent. In Flanders today approximately 163 churches out of a total of about 784 belong to a recognized denomination. Nationally, this accounts for about 572 out of an estimated total of 1700 churches.

The late 1980s also marked a new phase for another reason. As official recognition drew closer, the following of the post-war evangelical churches paradoxically stagnated, falling prey to the same forces that emptied the Catholic churches. This evolution forced them to transform their rigid mentalities and ponder ways of being evangelical beyond the purely conversionist. Eric Zander, a church planter at the BGM (now Vianova), diagnoses: "We must dare to face the facts: many churches have become too distant from society. They have become invisible, inaudible and lacking in credibility. Have church leaders responded appropriately to the profound cultural changes of the past 30 years? Probably not enough" (Zander, 2021, p. 16). The evangelical struggle to strike a balance between holding on to an orthodox theology and adopting a renewed role in today's pluralistic society has produced in some denominations a shift from "mission" to "action", or from "faith-by-dogma" to "faith-by-praxis" (Cloke, Thomas, & Williams, 2012). This shift, together with the gradual depillarization of the welfare landscape, has yielded a stronger emphasis on charity. On these grounds, I will argue in a later section, it is not unreasonable to suggest that these evangelical charities might form promising objects of inquiry from the angle of postsecular rapprochement. Before further discussing that, however, I will now zoom in on the second group of evangelicals, the emergence of whom is the result of complex migration patterns.

2.2.4. Migrant churches

While the post-war evangelical denominations were navigating this challenging transformation process, a new eclectic group of churches gained momentum in the 1990s. Being the products of multidirectional transnational migration processes, these communities would further redefine and complexify the Flemish evangelical field, resulting in an ever-richer tapestry of church types. For the most part, this new wave of "migrant churches" included Pentecostal charismatic churches from Sub-Sahara African (especially Ghanaian and Nigerian), Eastern European, South American and Asian origin. Many of them were established by lay immigrants replicating the church they knew in their home country, or deliberately founded as overseas branches by a mother church as part of a missionary project (Kalu, 2008). Scholars and church planters in this respect speak of "reverse mission" dynamics, stressing the ways in which traditional mission areas have now become the protagonists in re-evangelizing the rapidly secularizing societies of Europe, including Flanders (Bangura, 2017; Freston, 2010).

Although functioning as dynamic nodes in a globe-spanning (digital) space of flows, these young church communities are grounded in local contexts. A few of them have become part of the FS by joining the VVP or by creating new recognized denominations, such as the "Redeemed Christian Church of God" (RCCG) and the "Antioch network". The majority, however, has remained in society's shadows, either deliberately or for lack of tools to integrate. This vulnerable position is well reflected in their spatial conduct. As observed by urban sociologist David Garbin (Garbin, 2012, 2013), most of the churches in Europe construct their place by dynamically occupying and appropriating the "gaps of the post-industrial city". In Flemish cities too, the bulk of migrant churches reside in "underregulated and underutilized spaces" such as terraced houses, garages, shops, warehouses or railway infrastructure; spaces left vacant as they lack utility for the local setting (Beeckmans, 2020, p. 259). Rather than deliberately choosing one area over another, these churches are bound to settle in locations with a certain "establishment potential" (Beeckmans, 2019a, p. 185), i.e. neighbourhoods with low rents and high accessibility, often located in the 19th century belt of the city and near a railway station. This situation stands in stark contrast to that of the older, post-war evangelical churches, most of which are situated in the heart of the city.

Other explanations for the invisibility of these church communities include the tendency of worshippers to find their way to the church via internet (Beeckmans, 2019a, p. 186), the clandestine status of many church members (Mareels, 2016) and the "hostile climate towards 'cults' and 'sects'" in Belgium (Maskens, 2008, pp. 50-51). Often, these churches' existence in anonymity coincides with difficulty to integrate into the local social fabric. Despite some attempts, for instance, the creation of lasting bonds between the older evangelical churches and the new migrant communities has not yet succeeded (Schrooten & Trappers, 2019, p. 104). According to preacher Maarten Hertoghs, this has been owing to language barriers (whereas older churches predominantly speak Dutch, the official languages of new churches range from English to Spanish, Russian and Twi) and a more general mix of cultural and theological differences (in Barentsen, 2019, p. 65). Whereas informal networks have been forged among the Dutch-speaking churches, this is not the case among the newer migrant churches, a few exceptions aside, such as the attempt of the "African-Caribbean Pastors Association" in Antwerp. Nevertheless, I will suggest in a subsequent section, the solidarities practiced by this migrant group are worth exploring from a postsecular gaze. First, I will elaborate on why I believe this is the case in the group of post-war churches.

2.2.5. Post-war evangelical groups in Flanders: opening up?

My main argument in suggesting that older evangelical groups in Flanders have become more receptive to forms of postsecular rapprochement relates to their theological shift towards here-and-now approaches and, consequently, their enhanced emphasis on praxis. In the Anglo-Saxon context, British scholars have noticed a repositioning of eschatological perspectives within certain evangelical denominations (Cloke et al., 2012). They argue that whereas earlier self-containment was rooted in ideas about the Kingdom of God being preserved for the eschatological future, emergent transformational approaches have opened doors towards engagement with society in the here and now. Such approaches acknowledge that waiting for the second coming of Christ and the Kingdom does not run counter to manifesting that Kingdom today.

A crucial turning point in this respect was the International Congress on World Evangelisation held in Lausanne in 1974. During this gathering, global Evangelical leaders addressed the deep-seated divisions between fundamentalist evangelicals for whom spreading the Word was the prime concern (mainly believers from the US), and more liberal evangelicals with a penchant for social action (many South Americans). Most notably, it was Englishman John Stott who managed to reconcile the various visions in the eventual covenant, which declares that "evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty" (website Lausanne Congress). While preaching the gospel remained the major purpose of evangelicals, it was now agreed upon that this mission should be embedded within a wider socio-cultural context (Bebbington, 2017).

There are doubts, however, regarding Lausanne's direct impact on Flemish evangelicalism, known for its fundamentalist appeal (Krabbendam, 2017; Nullens, 2010). As mentioned earlier, Lausanne's call for ecumene was not reflected in Flemish evangelicals' initial incentives to engage in the institutionalization process, i.e. to obstruct the liberal monopoly in relations to the state. However, it is often stated that "when it rains in America it drips in Flanders" (Nullens, 2010). Since the turn of the millennium, discursive shifts do indicate a move towards transformational approaches in Flanders. Zander, for instance, writes in the name of Vianova: "Even though we are citizens of another Kingdom, even though we are pilgrims and strangers on this earth, this world and its culture still remain our home until Jesus returns" (Zander, 2021, p. 39). As part of what he explicitly calls the "learning process" of evangelicals to become a part of present culture, Zander advocates "churches without walls" (Zander, 2021, p. 11). Such churches embody and enact the Message through forging relationships across the city, rather than proclaiming it without seeking resonance. In 2019, another book was published titled "Zoektocht naar hoop voor de stad" (Quest of hope for the city), authored by several preachers associated with the ETF (Barentsen, 2019). Likewise, the book formulates a

critique of the gospel being first and foremost about personal salvation. Instead, it calls for the establishment of new urban communities across religious boundaries and urges to explore fresh expressions of the gospel in doing so. This aspiration is shared by theologian and former rector of the ETF Patrick Nullens, who states the following: "We must overcome our own self-interest and show solidarity beyond our own group alone (…) Being evangelical (…) means that our commitment to the gospel and the authority of Scripture is a powerful source of inspiration, and not, in fact, a barrier to our commitment to society" (Nullens, 2016). It can be argued, in other words, that there is a trend towards stating that the realization of the gospel in Flanders needs to be rediscovered and settled into the heart of present-day culture (see also Bolger, 2012).

According to theologian Colin Godwin, Belgian evangelicals did indeed transition "from cultural isolation to integration" over the last two decades (Godwin, 2013b, p. 397). Although this characterization may be a bit overstated, considerable efforts have been made at contextualizing the gospel. Over the years, it has become evident that Belgium is not the most conducive context for organizing mass evangelization events, as attempted with Eurofest in 1975 in Brussels (Krabbendam, 2017). By contrast, evangelicals have come to understand that for religious groups to gain legitimacy in a country deeply molded by Catholics, they must fulfill a social role. Over the last two decades, therefore, Flemish churches have increasingly engaged in social ministry, distributing food, raising money for NGOs, providing administrative help for illiterate people, and so on. They have, moreover, established the first local evangelical FBOs and parachurch organizations, often addressing specific target groups, including women in prostitution, youngsters, people in poverty and refugees. Arguably, this development was facilitated by the depillarization of the welfare landscape, which has opened new avenues for welfare actors falling outside the scope of the traditional pillar structures to engage in charitable activities.

In the British context, Paul Cloke and colleagues summarize this gradual shift towards adhering to a social gospel as "a move from faith simply as personal belief to faith-as-practice" (Cloke, Thomas, & Williams, 2012, p. 105). Rather than by the *imperative* of saving others, such faith involves living out and embodying one's theological viewpoints with the *hope* of doing so. From the perspective of postsecular rapprochement, Cloke argues elsewhere, this is a promising evolution (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013). In particular, he suggests, while faith-by-praxis will not necessarily generate postsecularity, it has "begun to open up some postsecular possibilities, as faith-based activists find common ground with others who are willing to fight the same ethical cause even if they do not share the same broad frameworks of morality" (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, pp. 41-42). A similar stance was put forward in

a non-academic way by the Flemish preachers in the book mentioned earlier (Barentsen, 2019). In their view, city life provides a basis for cross-faith cooperation, as it enables to engage in actions based on a sense of shared humanity rather than on a common set of beliefs. I quote: "One can contribute to the city from one's own (evangelical) conviction with partners who do the same from a different philosophy of life. There are opportunities to fight poverty and injustice and seek the good for the city with partners who show up on occasion, without long-term or intensive forms of cooperation that would compromise and dilute the gospel" (Barentsen, 2019, p. 174). In sum, it can be argued that the combination of a discursive shift towards here-and-now theological approaches and a move towards praxis has seemingly translated into a greater emphasis on social justice among evangelicals in Flanders. As such, they seem to be slowly letting go of their historical resistance towards liberals and believers of other faith, and even become receptive to certain forms of rapprochement.

2.2.6. Migrant churches in Flanders: willing partners?

Despite their inclination towards self-containment, I suggest, the young migrant communities too can be considered potential actors for entering in rapprochement with welfare actors of other faith. First, many of these churches (mainly Pentecostal) significantly engage in practices of social work and solidarity. Indeed, it has been argued in international literature on migrant religion, religious instances tend to adopt a more congregational form after migration, taking on multiple roles beyond the purely religious, including education and social services (Warner & Wittner, 1998; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001). Amongst others, migrant churches help newcomers derive meaning from and cope with the alienating emotional and spiritual consequences of migration by providing alternative interpretations of the migrant experience and performing rituals (Bangura, 2017; Blommaert, 2011; Mareels, 2016; Maskens, 2008). They offer people in precarity a social network, provide communities of knowledge, offer financial assistance to members in need, shelter the homeless, distribute food on the streets, refer people to the right support channels and help undocumented members in obtaining documents (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2014; Blommaert, 2011; Meeus & Schillebeeckx, 2015; Schrooten & Trappers, 2019).

The increased importance of practices like this, so suggests international literature on global Pentecostalism, is underpinned by a theological shift occurring across charismatic Pentecostal churches worldwide. In particular, Donald Miller observes, many churches increasingly view social ministry as being at the core of the gospel, departing from their traditional emphasis on Christ's return and the apocalypse (D. Miller, 2009). In literature, this evolution is referred to as a shift towards "progressive Pentecostalism" (D. Miller, 2009; Myers, 2015) or "engaged Pentecostalism" (Cornelio,

2021), highlighting how Pentecostals have become involved with worldly affairs and address what they perceive as social and political evils. This theological shift is intimately tied to the emergence of prosperity doctrines preaching health and wealth in the here-and-now – a movement which I will discuss in more detail in a later chapter (Marshall, 2009). While Pentecostal promises of material wealth and health have increasingly cushioned the absence of formal safety nets in the Global South (Chesnut, 2012), much less is known about their roles in contexts *with* comprehensive (secularized) welfare regimes, like Flanders. It is not unreasonable to expect that their strong focus on solidarity would make them potential partners for entering into forms of postsecular rapprochement.

Second, I suppose, these churches can be expected to be potential partners since they possess resources that other (formal) actors lack. It is argued, for instance, that they display a distinct feel for detecting local social needs and are well-positioned to reach vulnerable communities that other instances find challenging to access (Schrooten & Trappers, 2019). One can suggest that this makes them interesting partners for public social centers and other formal actors tasked with realizing social rights through outreach.

2.2.7. Conclusion

In this section I have sketched the outlines of the evangelical (solidarity) landscape in Flanders, dividing it in two segments. My main aim was to suggest that within both of them (the historically self-contained tradition of Flemish evangelicalism and the younger group of migrant communities), there are grounds for expecting forms of emerging postsecular rapprochement. Meanwhile, I have provided the context necessary for selecting and framing the particular evangelical solidarities I will study in depth.

2.3. Conclusion

This chapter has painted the backdrop against which the upcoming case studies will unfold. First, it provided a quick historical overview of the welfare-religion nexus in Flanders. It has, in this respect, spoken of a "subsidiarity paradox", suggesting that while the principle of subsidiarity was initially implemented as a catholic instrument of control, it might now form a catalyst for the emergence of postsecular rapprochements. Secondly, the chapter has sketched the evangelical Christian landscape in Flanders, expecting that recent shifts towards the here-and-now might open avenues towards rapprochements across welfare players of different faith.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodological foundations of this study, the research question of which demands a flexible and open qualitative research design. First, I will justify my case selection method, which is a nested approach with maximum variation within the nests. Second, I will clarify my choice to cyclically collect data via a mix of document analysis, in-depth interviews and participatory observation, and to analyze them using Grounded Theory principles. Third, I will discuss the methods and sources I used case by case. Fourth, I will reflect on my own faith dispositions and the role they have played during the research process, framing it as a postsecular learning process in itself. Finally, I will dwell on the ethical questions and struggles that inevitably emerged during the study.

3.1. Case selection method: nested case studies

In chapter two, I have justified why evangelical Christianity forms a promising religious tradition for studying dynamics of postsecularity in the Flemish welfare landscape. In order to gain a deeper understanding, then, I will conduct six case studies, all evangelical solidarity initiatives settled in a local Flemish welfare regime. As argued before, a case is considered evangelical when it stands "in the tradition of the global Christian networks arising from the eighteenth century revival movements associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield" (Larsen, 2007, p. 1). A later section will thoroughly discuss the data and methods I drew on in each case study. First, I will elaborate on the selection of these cases, which took place on two levels. In short, seven evangelical solidarities (level 2) were selected within two cities (level 1), using different selection criteria on each level.

3.1.1. Level 1: The cities of Antwerp and Ghent

Scholars have identified the "rapidly diversifying" urban as the setting where the emergence of liminal spaces marked by postsecularity is most likely to occur and the easiest to detect (Beaumont & Baker, 2011, p. 2; also A. Molendijk et al., 2010, p. ix). Cities, they argue, contain those places that "cry out for 'something to be done about something'", housing the excesses of exclusion, impoverishment and marginalization. Simultaneously, they bring together "the greatest intensity, energy and hope for just alternatives" (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, p. 32). As for the first level, therefore, I decided to focus on the two largest cities in Flanders: Antwerp and Ghent, respectively counting 539.419 and 267.712 residents in 2023 (Stad in Cijfers Antwerpen; Gent in Cijfers). Both cities exhibit those characteristics identified as conducive to dynamics of postsecular rapprochement, including rising poverty, a rapid diversification of the population, and a localization of social policy (see S. Van Dam, 2016, pp. 55-56;

91-92). Both moreover host large numbers of religious communities, including evangelical Christians. Although keeping track of their numbers is not an easy task given their volatility, it is guessed that, in 2021, Antwerp was home to around 200 evangelical churches, whereas Ghent counted around 70 (conversation with expert of evangelical field). The two waves of evangelicalism discussed in the previous chapter apply to the Ghent and Antwerp context. Both cities, in this respect, recently witnessed the emergence of the first evangelical FBOs.

The two cities also differ in many respects. These differences, I assume, enhance the chances of observing a greater variety in the religious-secular patterns around which evangelical solidarities are constructed. Rather than to compare these cities as an end in itself, in other words, I use their differences to gain a broader insight into the phenomenon under study, namely evangelical solidarities and their role in largely secularized local welfare regimes.

First, the political climate of the two cities varies. While the city council has been center-left in Ghent since the 1970s, it is currently center-right in Antwerp. Second, they differ in their relations with civil society actors. Ghent, on the one hand, boasts strong ties between public authorities and civil society, both of whom are aware of their mutual dependency and share the belief that the local level matters in improving the conditions for disadvantaged groups (Oosterlynck, De Rynck, De Waele, Lamberts, & Vermeersch, 2021). In Antwerp, on the other hand, the relationships between City and civil society have been more turbulent and volatile, with cooperation often being "overshadowed by the primacy of politics" (S. Van Dam, 2016, p. 56). As of 2018, for instance, a change in the alderman for social affairs has led to a significantly larger budget for pursuing a pro-active response to poverty than in the previous legislature.

Finally, Ghent and Antwerp differ in their stance towards religious traditions. Ghent, with its rich liberalist and socialist history, is known for its progressive yet secular culture. This reflects into a fairly hands-off attitude when it comes to religious congregations in general and evangelical churches in particular, resulting in a situation where there is few dialogue with and knowledge about each other, and where the evangelical church-landscape is little charted. No department of religious affairs as such exists in Ghent. More so than Ghent, Antwerp acts from a logic of control towards religious communities (Conversations with City employees). As a result, Antwerp does have a department of religious affairs from which dialogue is organized, limited research is done and advice and support is offered for problems with fire safety, noise, statutes and building codes (Leman, De Pooter, & Rath,

2006). The city employee responsible for communication with evangelical churches stands in contact with (almost) all churches in Antwerp and informs them about their rights and duties.

3.1.2. Level 2: a maximum variation sampling technique

In order to select particular evangelical solidarities in these cities, I employ a maximum variation sampling technique selecting cases that vary as much as possible with respect to some key dimensions of variation identified by the researcher (Patton, 2002). Variety on these criteria is expected to generate a maximum of heterogeneity in the phenomenon under study, illuminating both the singularity of a case and shared patterns that run across cases. Informal interviews with 10 people active in the evangelical field of Ghent and/or Antwerp have helped me gain insight into the organization of these cities' evangelical landscapes and the internal dynamics shaping them. Above all, this confirmed that these fields are anything but orderly organized. By contrast, they display a considerable level of fragmentation, with some groups remaining isolated while others being connected through superficial or intense (in)formal contacts. Based on this exploratory research as well as literature on evangelical Christianity in Flanders (see chapter 2) and FBOs more generally, I decided to extract the following criteria to capture a maximum variation in the manifestations of evangelical solidarity and their relations to their local welfare landscape: the language spoken (Dutch or otherwise), the organizational form (Church or FBO), and the age (< 2000, 2000-2005, > 2005). I applied these criteria to the contexts of both Ghent and Antwerp.

The first criterium relates to the primary language spoken in the case, that is, the language used for official communication. In particular, I chose to select Dutch-speaking and non-Dutch speaking cases. I did so mainly because this language divide correlates with the two segments differentiated in the preceding chapter. As discussed earlier, Evangelical presence in Flanders has come in two waves, the first of which occurred after the first world war via Anglo-Saxon missionaries and the second of which was tied to more recent flows of migration, most notably from Sub Sahara Africa and South America. Both in Ghent and Antwerp, the churches associated with the first wave tend to speak Dutch. These churches have become more embedded in the local social fabric and stand in closer contact with each other than the younger, mostly English, Spanish or French speaking churches. For instance, whereas almost all the Dutch-speaking evangelical churches in Ghent are connected via the informal network "ILD" (pseudonym) where they exchange information and advice, non-Dutch speaking churches make no part of this and have no similar networks among themselves. Even more so, despite some attempts like the "African-Caribbean Pastors Association" in Antwerp, many of the non-Dutch speaking churches remain islands with no ties to others, or only to those churches and organizations

that share the same ethnic background. As argued in chapter two, moreover, the reasons to expect that these segments are promising for studying dynamics of postsecular rapprochement differ. The Dutch-speaking evangelical groups in Ghent and Antwerp, on the one hand, have started to make a move towards contextualizing themselves in the here-and-now, which is reflected in an increased focus on social action and (organized forms of) solidarity. The non-Dutch speaking migrant churches, on the other, tend to function as arrival infrastructures for newcomers, exercising more ad-hoc forms of solidarity and support in doing so. By selecting cases based on their primary language, i.e. either "Dutch-speaking" or "else", I hope to capture these variations.

The second criterium relates to the organizational type, namely "church" or "FBO". While both types usually share the same legal status of "nonprofit" (vzw) or "factual association" (fv), the difference lies in how they present themselves, namely as a formal organizational structure or not. In this research, an FBO is defined as a formal nonprofit organization which draws its inspiration from religious faith, either to a large or small extent, and of which the center activity is the exercise of solidarity rather than worship. The term has been criticized for several reasons, including its exclusion of *in*formal initiatives, and its specific roots in Christianity, particularly Protestantism (Maes, Schrooten, Raeymaeckers, & Broeckaert, 2023a, 2023b). Although these critiques are certainly valid in many contexts, they constitute the very reasons for using the term in this research. A church, then, is defined as a group of evangelicals who primarily come together around the practice of worship, with practices of solidarity serving as a secondary activity. A church can be related to a recognized denomination such as the VVP (the alliance of Flemish Pentecostal churches), Vianova (the former Belgian Gospel Mission), the VEG (the Free Evangelical Churches), the RCCG (the Redeemed Christian Church of God), the Antioch network, and the GOV (Reformed Discussion in Flanders). When this is the case, a church can also be recognized individually, meaning it receives subsidies by the state. This is uncommon, however. Both in Antwerp and Ghent, only three individual evangelical churches are recognized – respectively two Dutch speaking and one Russian/English speaking church, and three Dutch-speaking churches.

Most research addressing the roles of religion in welfare states has centered on formalized expressions of religious-inspired solidarity, excluding the activities of churches and congregations (e.g. Dierckx, Vranken, & Kerstens, 2009). In Evangelical Christianity, however, the first FBOs emerged only two decades ago, primarily in the Dutch-speaking segment. As previously mentioned, this evolution forms part of their recent transition towards a greater embeddedness in society at large and, theologically, towards the here-and-now. Including both FBOs and churches as cases, I assume, will generate

essential diversity in the ways in which solidarities are permeated by faith, in the degree to which they are organized either ad hoc or in a more structured manner, and, consequently, in how they position themselves in the welfare landscape.

Third, I have chosen to select age as a criterium of differentiation, viewing cases founded before 2000 as "old", cases from before 2005 as "medium" in age and those after 2005 as "young". Both experts and scholars observe that the behavior of evangelical groups in Antwerp and Ghent changes as time proceeds. While operating under the radar at first, they tend to open up in later phases and shape the atmosphere of their neighborhood (Blommaert, 2011). By choosing 2000 and 2005 as the threshold years, I decide to include a) settled cases founded in the first post-war evangelical wave, b) the first migrant groups from the second wave who have since worked their way through, c) the most recent groups from the second wave who are probably still paving their way.

Using these criteria, I ended up finding and gaining access to seven evangelically inspired solidarity initiatives. Not only they transversally combine the different selected characteristics, but most of them were also recommended by experts as information-rich cases. The eventual selection was led by pragmatic decisions and circumstances as well. Gaining access during a pandemic was not always easy, especially in the case of hard-to-reach groups like young migrant churches which require real life interaction on the field. As for the latter, for instance, a number of doors were closed before a church eventually accepted me as a researcher. For ethical reasons, pseudonyms have been employed for all names mentioned.

Table 1: Cases following the selection criteria

Level 1		**Ghent**			**Antwerp**			
Level 2		Case 1 Heart Community	Case 2 Church of Christ	Case 3 Miracle Church for all People	Case 4 Fountain of Life Church	Case 5 House of Transform ation	Case 6 Harvest of Hope	Case 7 Rescue Operation
	Language	Dutch	Dutch/Else (Twi)	Else (English)	Else (English/ Twi)	Else (English/ Dutch)	Dutch	Else (Spanish)
	Organization	FBO	Church	Church	Church	FBO/Chu rch	FBO	Church
	Age	Medium (2002)	Medium (2003)	Young (2007)	Medium (2002)	Young (2008)	Old (1990)	Young (2016)

3.2. Methodology case by case

Data collection and analysis took place in several phases and in cyclical interaction with literature review and theory construction. One could say that they were conducted following the principle of the hermeneutic circle, namely as an interpretative process which involves a constant shuffling between larger and smaller units of meaning in order to capture the significance of both. During this process, I relied on the instruments provided by Grounded Theory, most notably the principles of open, axial and selective coding (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Respectively, this involved inductively and systematically breaking up data in categories (codes), drawing connections between them, and identifying the core categories around which to develop theory. I did so using the software of N-Vivo12, designed for qualitative data analysis and coding.

As for the collection of data, I decided to match the method with the peculiarity of the case. In particular, I combined document analysis, semi-structured in-depth interviews and participatory observation. Some cases, like the younger migrant churches, turned out being less discursively, but rather practice oriented. In these cases, I employed a combination of participatory observation and non- or semi-structured in-depth interviews taking place in the field or online. Others, mostly older FBOs, by contrast, put a greater effort into their formal and internal discourse, while still others, including Pentecostal groups, tended to be very active on the internet, streaming their sermons all over the globe and sharing their healing and prophecy programs on YouTube channels. Here, it turned out more appropriate to combine fieldwork with Document Analysis of websites, flyers and Facebook pages, or YouTube videos and online services.

Ideally, according to Glaser and Strauss, data collection comes to an end when the researcher experiences a sense of theoretical saturation, that is, when new data no longer contribute significantly to the development of theory. Although using this ideal as a guideline, data collection was prematurely discontinued in some cases for pragmatic reasons, including a sudden reluctance of respondents to allow entry into the field, exhaustion of respondents willing to talk, or a lack of access to certain documents – things that contain information in themselves, however. Still, enough data has been collected to provide evidence for the arguments presented in this thesis. In the next sections, I will discuss the data collection methods used in each particular case study and provide an overview of the data gathered. I will begin by providing an overview of the informal conversations held in the exploratory phase of field research, which was aimed at getting a grip on the Ghent and Antwerp evangelical landscapes.

3.2.1. Exploratory research

From January to March 2021, I engaged in several informal online conversations with people who can be considered experts of the evangelical field, whether because of their job in the Federal Synod, their work as a city employee, their role as a pastor or as a worshipper.[2] These conversations have helped me gain insight into the Flemish evangelical landscape as described in chapter 2 and into the specific fields of Antwerp and Ghent. They have, in this respect, facilitated the selection of information-rich cases. Contact with these experts was obtained via snowballing.

3.2.2. Cap, Heart, Church of Christ

The first case study is a local network which links the Ghent city council with a pluralistic welfare organization with Catholic roots (Circle around People), an evangelical Dutch-speaking FBO founded in 2002 (Heart Community) and an evangelical church planted in 2003 (Church of Christ). While initially selected as separate case studies, the intricate connections between Heart Community and the Church of Christ soon became evident, as both turned out being connected to an originally catholic organization. Hence, I opted to treat these cases as one case study.

I gained access to the Church of Christ using the snowballing method. After an informal conversation with an expert of the Ghent evangelical field who referred me to the pastor, the latter allowed me to contact other church members. The church, which is quite small, exceptionally consists of a Twi and a Dutch speaking segment. To find Twi speaking church members willing to talk proved challenging, resulting in only one interview. I did, however, manage to speak with some Dutch-speaking church members, most of whom turned out to be volunteering in Heart Community as well, an FBO I was already planning to study.

To gain access to Heart Community was a surprisingly challenging operation due to the directors' skepsis about the intentions behind the research and their reluctance to open up about the history of the organization. After several phone calls and e-mails in which I transparently explained my intention, they finally accepted to join, specifically after having mentioned Habermas's theory. This reluctance, I came to realize, had to do with the object of inquiry itself, namely the FBO's postsecular learning process with CaP and the City of Ghent. Revealing past and present tensions, the directors feared, would obstruct further rapprochement in the future. After an in-depth interview with the directors, snowballing took me to other key figures.

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[2] Conversations with theologian and informal representative of the evangelical community in Ghent; Conversation with worshipper in evangelical church in Ghent; Conversation with employee of the city of Ghent; Conversation with theologian and pastor in Antwerp church; Conversations with employee in the department of religion of the city of Antwerp; Conversation with former president of the Federal Synod of Evangelical Churches; Conversations with employee Federal Synod of Evangelical Churches, specialized in Antwerp; Conversation with employee in the department of community building of the city of Antwerp; Conversation with employee of the city of Antwerp; Conversation with employee in the department of equal opportunities of the city of Ghent

Finally, I decided to zoom in on the umbrella organization Heart was connected to; a pluralist organization with Catholic roots. Soon, it became apparent that, in terms of dynamics of postsecularity, this organization was relevant in its own right. Sending an e-mail was enough to obtain a first interview in this organization. Interviews and document analysis tied to this case, moreover, simultaneously provided more information about Heart Community.

In total, analysis of these cases is based on 17 semi-structured in-depth interviews with staff members, volunteers, pastors and church members of the organizations just mentioned, and complemented by a document analysis of meeting reports, vision texts and websites. From February 2021 till May 2022, the following semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, listed here in chronological order.

Table 2: Semi-structured interviews case-study Cap-Heart-Church of Christ

I1+ I10	Pastor Church of Christ, 24/02/2021 & 25/01/2022	Online (twice)
I2	Member of Twi-speaking Church of Christ, 05/03/2021	Respondent's home
I3	Volunteer Heart and church member Church of Christ, 15/03/2021	Public Park
I4	Heart Director, double interview with I5, on 16/03/2021	Online
I5	Heart Director, double interview with I4, on 16/03/2021	Online
I6 + I11	Volunteer Heart and church member Church of Christ, 18/03/2021 & 27/01/2022	Public Park (twice)
I7	Cap board member, 06/10/2021	Cap
I8	Employee local social policy, 23/12/2021	Online
I9	Cap board member, 25/01/2022	Online
I12	Member of supporting church, 03/02/2022	Respondent's home
I13	Volunteer Heart and church member Church of Christ, 07/02/2022	Online
I14	Cap coordinator, 08/02/2022	Online
I15	Ex-volunteer Heart, 10/02/2022	Online
I16	Ex-cap coordinator, 04/03/2022	Respondent's home
I17	Ex-volunteer Heart, 24/03/2022	Coffee bar

Further, analysis was grounded in the documents listed below. D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, D8, D11 and D12 were consulted on 04/05/2022 in the Cap Archive to which I gained access via a staff member. D10, an extensive blog authored by Heart's founder, has been of particular relevance for analysis.

Table 3: Documents case-study Cap-Heart-Church of Christ

D1	Discussion nota, April 1994
D2	Document 1994
D3	Brochure 1994
D4	General meeting 18/11/1996
D5	General meeting 16/12/1996
D6	General meeting 11/06/2003
D7	Website Cap
D8	Vision statement cap 2018
D9	Cap magazine 2017
D10	Blog founder Heart
D11	General Meeting cap 1998
D12	Report executive board cap 31/03/2009
D13	General meeting Cap 11/06/2003. → D6
D14	Keller, Timothy. 2008. The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith. Penguin Books,.
D15	Keller, Timothy. 2010. Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just. Penguin Books.

3.2.3. RCCG – Fountain of Life

The second case study is an Antwerp branch of a Pentecostal mega-church based in Lagos, Nigeria. Established in 2002, the church predominantly uses English for both its services and official communication. The church, which I call Fountain of Life, is one of the biggest Pentecostal Churches in Antwerp with approximately 200 members. Gaining access happened via the secretary who has formed a key figure in bringing me into contact with the right people. After some interviews, however, finding more people willing to conduct formal interviews became challenging. At the time, Covid measures were still strict. From 15/01/2021 until 01/09/2021, church service allowed only 15 people (see https://vlaanderen.religio.be/nieuws/laatste-stand-van-zaken-coronavirus%E2%80%93-impact-op-de-kerkraad). I therefore decided to focus on the church's extensive online discourse first, which included websites, healing programs, sermons and prayer sessions shared and streamed on YouTube and Facebook. Only in the spring of 2022, I started physically joining church service on Sunday in the hope to meet potential interviewees. Since it quickly became apparent that most church members were not receptive to formal interviews, I decided to view my time in church as field work

and engage in as many informal conversations as possible while remaining transparent about my objectives.

Table 4: Semi-structured in-depth interviews case study Fountain of Life

I18 + I25	Pastor, 17/03/2021 + 10/05/2022	Pastor's office (twice)
I19	Secretary, 29/04/2021	Secretary's office
I20 + I21	Church member and administrative aid, 04/05/2021 + 07/05/2021	Online (twice)
I22	Director of organization active in the red-light district in the same period as FOL, 19/05/2021	Online
I23	Church member, 19/05/2021	Online
I24	Church member and head of the welfare department, 15/05/2022	Church
I26	Pastor's wife, 10/05/2022	Pastor's wife's office

The following documents were used for analysis. D16, a book written by the pastor about starting a church in the city of Antwerp, has been of particular relevance. Further, the numerous healing programs and sermons on the pastor's YouTube channel and on the church's Facebook page have served as background information.

Table 5: Documents case study Fountain of Life

D16	Book written by the pastor, published in August 2010
D17	Video on pastor's YouTube channel, 22/02/2021
D18	Church service streamed online, 11/04/2021
D19	Website FOL
D20	Video on pastor's YouTube channel, 08/09/2021
D21	Description of YouTube channel, written by the pastor
D22	Church service streamed online, 14/11/2021
D23	Church service streamed online, 12/02/2023

Interviews and document analysis were complemented by going to church on Sunday (10h-13h) in the spring of 2022.

Table 6: Field work case study Fountain of Life

Sunday church service, 01/05/2022
Visit to initiative of the church, 12/05/2022

Sunday church service, 15/05/2022
Sunday church service, 29/05/2022
Sunday church service, 19/06/2022
Sunday church service, 03/07/2022

3.2.4. Miracle Church for all People Ghent

Likewise, the third case study is a branch of a Pentecostal mega-church I call "Miracle Church for All People", and which is headquartered in Accra, Ghana. The church is located in Ghent since 2007. Initially, the primary language spoken was Twi, but recently, it was changed into English in order to attract a more diverse public. This case is a typical example of an African-initiated evangelical migrant church. It is relatively small (+/-50 members), settled in a terraced house in the city's fringes, and rooted very much in the local Ghanaian community. The church was the third I contacted out of the numerous churches in that street. Whereas the preceding churches had refused access because of lack of trust, this church's pastor eventually accepted me, viewing me as a sign of God. Since going to church on Sunday was not an option in pandemic times, I reached this pastor using the phone number pictured on the banner on the church's window. The pastor eventually referred me to the church secretary, who, in turn, referred me to another church member. Facing a deadlock after this conversation, I decided to join church service some months later in order to find new people willing to talk. During service, the pastor let me introduce myself and my research. Only two people, however, were willing to conduct a formal interview. The many informal conversations I held before and after church service were probably more valuable.

Table 7: Semi-structured in-depth interviews case study Miracle Church for all People Ghent

I27	Pastor, 14/03/2021	Online
I28	Secretary, 12/05/2021	Online
I29	Church member, 01/07/2021	Online
I30	Church member, 05/07/2022	Online
I31	Church member, 07/05/2022	Online

The following documents were used for analysis. Besides, I used the daily Facebook messages written by the global head of the church as background information, forwarded to me by the Ghent pastor through WhatsApp almost every day from February to July 2022.

Table 8: Discourse case study Miracle Church for all People Ghent

D24	Website Miracle Church for All People international
D25	Online church service 27/06/2021
D26	Online church service 18/07/2021
D27	Online church service 24/12/2021

I physically followed church service on Sunday (10h-13h) on the following dates.

Table 9: Field work case study Miracle Church for all People Ghent

Sunday church service (because of covid there were two services that day, I went to the first), 22/06/2021
Sunday church service, 12/09/2021
Sunday church service, 06/02/2022
Sunday church service, 13/02/2022
Sunday church service, 20/03/2022
Sunday church service, 24/04/2022
Sunday church service, 08/05/2022
Sunday church service, 22/05/2022
Sunday church service, 05/06/2022
Sunday church service, 26/06/2022
Sunday church service, 10/07/2022

3.2.5. Divine Unity Fellowship/ House of Transformation

This case is an Antwerp church and FBO established in 2008 inspired by "Divine Unity Fellowship", a Pentecostal mega-church founded in Kiev, Ukraine. The language used for official communication is both English and Dutch. This FBO was recommended by several experts of the Antwerp evangelical field for its busy activity in terms of solidarity. Gaining access went easy. The pastor and founder of the FBO immediately invited me into her home where she tried to help me get involved into the administrative tasks of the organization. Things became harder as I dived deeper into the case's history and its relationships with formal welfare instances. At a certain point, the pastor prohibited church members and homeless people from talking to me. YouTube videos and Facebook pages have then further enhanced my understanding of the FBO's discourse. Also, several informal conversations with City Employees assisted me to contextualize the case.

Table 10: Semi-structured in-depth interviews case study House of Transformation

I32 + I35	Prophetesse and founder, 01/03/2021 + 07/03/2021	Respondent's home (twice)
I33	Homeless person and church member, 01/03/2021	Home I33
I34	Homeless person and church member, 01/03/2021	Home I33
I36	Homeless person and church member, double interview with I38, 07/03/2021	Homeless shelter
I37	Homeless person and church member, double interview with I37, 07/03/2021	Homeless shelter
I38	Homeless person and church member, 07/03/2021	Home I33
I39	Social worker at organization that used to refer people to the house, 05/10/2021	Organization in question

The following documents were used for analysis.

Table 11: Documents case study House of Transformation

D28	Website Divine Unity Fellowship
D29	YouTube video posted on 25/01/2018, Christ TV
D30	YouTube video posted on 24/12/2018, Christ TV
D31	YouTube video posted in January 2019, Kingdom Family TV
D32	Facebook Page HoT (now deleted)
D33	Formal statute of foundation the Empowerment Hub vzw, 14/12/2012
D34	Flyer opening Empowerment Hub, 2017
D35	Church services Fellowship, streamed on Facebook
D36	YouTube video posted on 09/09/2020

3.2.6. Harvest of Hope

This case is a Dutch-speaking faith-based food distribution, founded in 1990 in Antwerp. Experts of the evangelical landscape recommended it for being one of the first evangelical FBO's in Antwerp and Flanders more generally. Just like Heart Community, they argued, this case epitomizes the shift from Mission to Action happening in the Dutch-speaking segment, which I described in chapter 2. Gaining access went easy. After calling the founder and explaining the research, I was invited to join food distribution and engage in conversations with more volunteers. Once there, however, it became clear once again that the formality of interviews often discourages people from participating. Interviews were complicated, moreover, by the practical context of food distribution. Therefore, I mainly held informal conversations as a part of field work.

Table 12: Semi-structured in-depth interviews case study Harvest

I40	Founder, 25/02/2021	Harvest
I41	Volunteer, 04/03/2021	Harvest
I42	Volunteer, 04/03/2021	Harvest
I43	Interview City Employee local social policy, 14/12/2021	Online

The following documents were used for analysis.

Table 13: Documents case study Harvest

D37	Website
D38	Regulation Subsidy for food aid, https://www.antwerpen.be/info/607007dab23ffb605311d68b/subsidie-voor-voedselhulp-reglement
D39	Online workshop day on family poverty in Antwerp, 2021

I conducted participatory observation on the following moments, where I helped packing and distributing food boxes.

Table 14: Field work case study Harvest

Food distribution on Thursday afternoon, 25/02/2021 12-17h30
Food distribution on Thursday afternoon, 04/03/2021 12-16h
Food distribution on Thursday afternoon, 30/09/2021 12-17h30
Food distribution on Thursday afternoon, 28/04/2022 12-17h30
Food distribution on Thursday afternoon, 19/05/2022 12-17h30
Food distribution on Thursday afternoon, 26/05/2022 12-17h30

3.2.7. Rescue Operation

This last case is a food distributing activity held by a Spanish-speaking church in Antwerp, the latter founded in 1995 and the former in 2016. Again, this church was suggested as a rich case in terms of solidarity practices by experts of the evangelical field in Antwerp, one of whom provided me with the phone number of the pastor. In this first conversation, it became clear that one particular activity played a pivotal role in the church's operations, namely a weekly food distribution known as "Rescue Operation". After contacting one of the driving forces behind the initiative, I was allowed to join the

distribution and conduct fieldwork on Thursday evenings. This has formed the main source of data for this case study.

Table 15: Semi-structured in-depth interviews case study Rescue Operation

I44	Pastor and son as translator, 21/03/2021	Church
I45	Church member and volunteer, 25/05/2021	Online
I46	Church member and volunteer, 14/06/2021	Online
I47	Church member, 22/09/2021	Online

Table 16: Documents case study Rescue Operation

D40	Church service streamed online, 23/05/2021
D41	Website CAW homeless center

I conducted participatory observation on the following moments, where I helped distributing food across the city.

Table 17: Field work case study Rescue Operation

21/03/2021: Sunday church service (10h-13h)
13/05/2021: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)
20/05/2021: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)
10/02/2022: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)
24/02/2022: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)
10/03/2022: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)
31/03/2022: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)
21/04/2022: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)
28/04/2022: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)
05/05/2022: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)
19/05/2022: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)
02/06/2022: Food distribution on Thursday evening (19u30-21u30)

3.3. My positionalities as a researcher

By his/her/their mere presence and positionalities, the qualitative researcher is co-constitutive of the object under study. During this research too, the process of data collection and analysis was guided by and entangled with my own positionalities as a researcher. Being a young, female, white non-believer has affected not only the unfolding of the very social situations I studied, but also the production of knowledge – the questions I asked myself and others, the elements I experienced as exceptional, the links I made. Although the four positionalities just mentioned have worked together very much in practice, I will analytically disentangle them in this section and reflect on the role of each during the research process – I will particularly focus on the phase of fieldwork, since pinpointing their exact effects in the process of analysis is much more challenging.

The first and probably most impactful positionality affecting this research has been what Johnsen and Fitzpatrick call the "metaphysical stance", namely "a person's fundamental orientation towards belief or non-belief in God(s)" (Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2022, p. 230). Situating myself somewhere between agnosticism and atheism has had its perks and its pulls in many layers of this research. Both probably became most explicit during fieldwork. Usually, the first things respondents have asked were whether I believe in a god, whether I am a Christian, or to what Christian denomination I belong. They mostly did so for two main reasons. First, they sought to get a grip on the status of our conversation: was there any chance that, by participating in the research, they could make me know God's Word? Second, they were probing as to how far they could go in telling me about their beliefs without me judging them. As regards to the first, I usually answered that, although they could always try, I did not consider myself convertible. Rather, I was willing to learn from their faith experience without engaging with truth claims. Still, especially in the Pentecostal cases, my atheism served as an asset in gaining access and eliciting people's willingness to talk to me. It granted me something to give in exchange for sharing their knowledge and experiences, namely an opportunity to perform their task of spreading the Word (although a priori ineffective – in a later section, I will reflect about the ethical questions this has brought along). Concerning the second, I tried to display a disposition of receptivity and openness, and I would often literally say I was not here to judge. Being atheist in this respect rather worked as a hurdle, which I tried to compensate by gaining inasmuch evangelical literacy.

Gaining literacy proved an essential attribute for another reason: it causes one to ask the right questions. Although it is an intrinsic part of the qualitative research process that such knowledge gradually accumulates, the questions I raised at the beginning were sometimes too obvious. This awareness hit after an interviewee warned me not to exoticize evangelical Christianity and in particular practices like speaking in tongues, as he felt that this easily stands in the way of real understanding and

even creates distance. Grasping a social phenomenon, by contrast, I realized, demands a reflexive attitude of inquiry which starts from presuming all social conduct is normal (or equally strange, if you will), even if seemingly miles away from one's own habits.

Central, it is argued in this respect, is to practice the mode of bracketing that Douglas Porpora has called "methodological agnosticism" (Porpora, 2006), a nuanced version of Peter Berger's "methodological atheism" (Berger, 1974), i.e. a disposition of research which remains open to considering the supernatural, while neither confirming nor excluding it. Such attitude involves (at least an attempt) to suspend one's disbelief (Oustinova-Stjepanovic, 2015). In practice, however, I have perceived it as nearly impossible to truly move away from my own assumption that no God is here bothering about earthly concerns. But this, I believe, did not affect the research in a negative way. After all, my object of inquiry was the way in which others' belief in God informs their practices of solidarity, and this in fact has nothing to do with the metaphysical question of whether God exists. Rather, what was important was applying what Habermas calls a "postmetaphysical" mode of thought, one that is "ethically modest in the sense that it is resistant to any generally binding concept of the good and exemplary life" (Habermas, 2008a, p. 110). For Habermas, postmetaphysical thinking results from "the secular awareness that one is living in a postsecular society" (Habermas, 2008a, p. 119). It involves recognizing faith and reason as complementary intellectual formations which have common roots in the so-called Axial Age (the era around the middle of the first millennium before Christ). I follow Habermas and others in their argument, however, that scientific knowledge should remain "intra-secular", namely embedded within the immanent world to increase its accessibility (Habermas, 2010; McLennan, 2010). What I aim to practice in this study, in other words, is a postmetaphysical sociology, one which is characterized by an inclusive, modest and reflexive form of secularism, and which is not concerned with the veracity of truths, but with how they are lived and the social consequences thereof.

During the conduct of this study, my own metaphysical positionality has somewhat evolved, as did my personal vision on religiosity. Whereas initially, I accepted religion as an illusionary yet useful reservoir of meaning and symbols carrying an important historical value, I can now see it as valuable in its own right. One could say that, through my engagement with religious texts, persons and events, I have entered a postsecular learning process myself and created a newfound openness towards mystery and the sacred. Inversely, this research and its questions have sparked the interest of respondents, and occasional (scarce) "fusions of horizons" between my frame of research and their lifeworld have encouraged both parties to reflexively consider our own practices.

The second impactful positionality has been my gender, which is female. The groups I conducted fieldwork in and did interviews with all hold a conservative gender ideology and most of them are structured around a strict male-female dichotomy, with the men being expected to perform as the head of the family and the women and the children to obey. This certainly has had an effect on how I was perceived and treated while conducting research. First of all, being female (in combination with being young) caused me to be taken less seriously by some of the men I interviewed – at least as I perceived it. This, however, probably led them to open up more easily: they had no reputation to lose and thus less of a reason to answer socially desirable. In one occasion, my gender, combined with the intimacy that questions about religiosity and spirituality entail, led a male respondent to keep on sending too personal messages after our conversation. With the women, then, being female mainly brought me advantage, as they would not consider me as a threat.

The third positionality involves being a white, native Fleming. In some cases (in particular, the three African Initiated Pentecostal cases), being white mattered a lot during field work. These cases adopt a reverse mission perspective and saw my presence as a confirmation of their divine purpose to bring Christianity back to Europe, viewing me as a vehicle to bring more white people to church. As such, my whiteness formed a useful and even a critical tool to gain access and convince them to talk to me. The first time I went to Miracle church for all people in Ghent, for instance, the following conversation took place (21/06/'21):

Pastor: "Our sister, your coming here is not just an accident"

Public: "Amen"

Pastor: "The white lady. It's a divine appointment"

Public: "Amen"

3.4. *Ethical considerations*

Ethics is not an isolated element of the research process, but demands a continuous sensitivity (Sin, 2005). As all research, this study has been guided by ethical considerations and has faced some ethical struggles. In this section, I will discuss four in particular, respectively the adverse effect of formally requiring informed consent, the issue of how far to take pseudonymization, the question of reciprocity, and the experience of mixed loyalties.

As argued by Miller and Boulton, gaining written consent is often seen as a single act, but in practice it should include "weighing up risk, privacy and protection, safety and potential harm, trust and

responsibility and demonstrating that this has been done in a systematic and auditable manner" (T. Miller & Boulton, 2007, pp. 2208-2209). Although I take informed consent seriously in itself, I have found that routinely adhering to standardized procedures was in some cases inadequate and even paradoxically unethical. In Dutch-speaking FBOs, the procedure of asking for written informed consent has formed a means of building legitimacy and trust. It reassured respondents that the research would run according to the promises described on paper, namely, that the provided data would be treated in confidence, that they could discontinue their participation at any time, that an audio recording would be made only if they agreed to it, and that literal quotations from the interview could be used anonymously in the thesis. The reverse was true for the churches with a migrant background, which tend to dislike formalities and distrust signing official documents. This was especially the case with the vulnerable people I interviewed at "House of Transformation", a Pentecostal homeless shelter. There, for instance, I bumped into an illiterate woman, something which I did not take into account in advance. The practice of obtaining written informed consent was so shameful for the woman that it negatively affected the interview afterwards. She was unable to open up to me and the interview only lasted 12 minutes. On the same day and in the same place, another difficult situation took place surrounding the obtainment of informed consent. One homeless woman wanted me to explain everything in the document in detail, because she did not trust it and was unable to fully understand it herself. This lasted almost one hour, and eventually, she decided the interview could not be recorded. After these two situations, I decided to record rather than write the informed consents in contexts where my intuition led me to presume that the effects of asking for formal permission would be counterproductive.

Second was the question of how far to take pseudonymization, striking the balance between protecting the anonymity of the cases on the one hand, and avoiding wasting valuable knowledge on the other. I have, for instance, long been hesitant about mentioning the names of the cities of Ghent and Antwerp. While wanting to protect the cases from being recognized since this could potentially have negative effects on their functioning and their relationships with formal actors, adapting the names of the cities would reduce the added value this thesis could bring in providing context-specific information on the evangelical field of Ghent and Antwerp. Even, it would prevent me from using secondary research to describe these contexts. I thus ended up using their names while trying to protect anonymity in other ways, for instance by pseudonymizing the names of the respondents, the cases, and in two cases also the names of the mother church they were tied to.

Third is the question of reciprocity or what I gave respondents in return for allowing me into their lives. In all cases, gaining access has entailed an implicit or explicit process of negotiation which, in the first place, needed to convince them of my open perspective towards religion. Most notably, some cases (FBOs in particular) and respondents decided to participate in the hope it would give them the public voice they currently lack. Most of them in this respect considered this research as a means to somehow spread the Word among new audiences. This wish, however, was sometimes at odds with (mainly churches') conscious attempts to remain invisible in order to protect undocumented members. Others (mainly churches) rather let me in hoping that I would personally come to know God and accept Him into my life, or that I would bring others into contact with Him. I long doubted whether this mutual instrumentalization was ethical since this trade-off is not in balance: I knew I would never become a Christian. I decided that, as long as I remained transparent, it was ethical. Displaying an openness while avoiding creating the illusion of being convertible, however, sometimes was a genuine balancing act.

The last ethical dilemma I have experienced has to do with what Andrew Williams calls mixed loyalties, that is, the ethical conflict and negotiation the researcher experiences during participation, when expected to align with certain values and practices that oppose his/her/their personal ethics (Williams, 2019). Both during interviews and in church services, homophobic and misogynistic remarks were made, especially in the two Pentecostal churches. To remain seated in church amidst church members who were collectively confirming them with "amen"s has caused internal conflict. This conflict was all the more pronounced in interviews. One time, I lost myself in discussions over the role of women in the family and evolution theory. After realizing that this contributed nothing to the research, I decided to cease making the effort of questioning such remarks. Another example concerns presenting myself in public alongside the church, particularly during the food distribution activities of the Spanish speaking church at the central station. On some occasions, I found myself experiencing difficulty while joining a prayer circle in public space, especially when my personal convictions did not align with the ideas being preached. The last example revolves around how some respondents dealt with the corona virus. Respondents of one case in particular did not stick to the measures that were in force at the time. Underpinned by religious ideas, they refused to wear a mask, respect the distance, and limit the number of people in the room. This put me in the dilemma between collecting data and securing the safety of my roommate. After my roommate's approval, I decided to stay nevertheless.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the qualitative methodological considerations guiding this study. I have justified the case selection method; a nested approach with maximum variation within the nests. I have addressed the data used case by case, which were cyclically collected via a mix of document analysis, in-depth interviews and participatory observation, and analyzed using Grounded Theory principles. Finally, I have reflected on my own positionalities and the ethical questions that have emerged during the study.

PART TWO

Chapter 4: Stretched Postsecular Rapprochement

4.1. Intro

This chapter discerns a first religious-secular pattern within the Flemish evangelical and welfare landscape, which I refer to as "stretched postsecular rapprochement" (see Dheedene, Loobuyck, & Oosterlynck, 2023). This pattern is a mediated form of postsecular rapprochement between welfare actors of different faith, marked by a trapped interaction structure wherein ethical crossovers occur at various levels and following different rhythms. Such a trapped structure, I will argue, facilitates bridging faith and other divides, and enables the inclusion of actors that would otherwise face difficulty in engaging with formal, secular bodies. I will illustrate this pattern by drawing on the case of a local cooperative network which links the Ghent city council to a pluralistic welfare organization with Catholic roots (Cap), an evangelical FBO (Heart Community) and an evangelical church (Church of Christ). Representing the first arrangement to include evangelical welfare actors in Ghent, this network forms an apt illustration of both the creative relations forged in disorganizing welfare mixes and the evangelical shift from mission to action.

In the following sections, I will unpack the trajectory of stretched postsecular rapprochement occurring in this chain of welfare actors. Starting from the first link of the chain, I will discuss how rapprochement has operated in the strongly evolved liaison between Cap and the local government. I will move down the chain by examining Cap's rapprochement with Heart Community, an evangelical FBO sustained by 17 local Dutch-speaking evangelical churches. Finally, I will elaborate on the interaction of Heart with one such church, namely a Church of Christ which is divided into a Dutch/English-speaking and a Twi-speaking group, the latter being the final link of the interaction chain. This endeavor will shed light on a stretched form of postsecular rapprochement which is negotiated and re-composed via relations at diverse levels of interaction. More specifically, it will show how welfare concepts affect each other and transform as they circulate across this interaction chain. Rather than by a "bubbling up of ethical values" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 3), these processes will be governed by power dynamics and strategical choices.

4.2. Link one: City/Cap, a postsecular space

The first link of the chain that forms part of the stretched form of postsecular rapprochement is the partnership between "Circle around people" (initially "Church" around people, Cap) and the Ghent city council. Cap, a pluralistic umbrella organization officially established in 1997, currently orchestrates the work of fourteen local poverty fighting organizations, each rooted in different faith

and ideological traditions, either Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical or secular-humanist. Over the past three decades, Cap has evolved into a well-established local actor in the Ghent welfare mix. This position did not emerge spontaneously but resulted from an extensive negotiation process over a range of symbolic and practical matters, both between Cap's member organizations themselves and in its relation to the city council. The history of these relationships offers valuable insights into dynamics of postsecular repositioning and learning within a secularizing and depillarizing welfare context.

4.2.1. City-Cap: a troubled history

It was 1994 as the Ghent vicar realized that the Catholic parish organizations located in the city's 19th century belt were all independently tackling the same set of social problems. Seeking to streamline their work, he decided to bring them to the table, calling these gatherings Church around People (CaP). All insisting on their autonomy, it eventually took five years until a consensus was reached between these parish organizations. Reports from this period reveal the following challenges and questions encountered by the various initiatives: How to bring the gospel to life while working with people in poverty (D1)? How to pass on the Good News "now that the whole society is urbanized and secularized" (D3, also D2)? How to work more closely between services and parishes (D2)? And most notably: What would a common vision look like (D2)?

With respect to the latter, it was decided in a 1994 meeting that each initiative should "question its own operation from the inspiration of others and the gospel". "Perhaps", writes the report of this meeting, "common elements could be found, which could lead to a common vision" (D2). A first vision text was drafted in 1996, taking into account both the approaches of all individual organizations and the evolving societal expectations of good charity. Among others, it stated: "poor people feel better accepted with popular devotion" (D4, D5). Therefore, volunteers should "use intelligible language". Also, it was argued, "we must be careful in our speaking to them": "No diminutives", and "do not patronize" (D5). The appropriate language for expressing religious or deep feelings in a secularizing context, it was agreed upon, was "the poetic" (D5).

In a heavily pillarized urban context, Cap's Catholic parochial origins and its connotations of paternalism and voluntarism initially hindered any cooperation with the socialist-governed City. Instead, the latter promoted a strong welfare state on the local level. The same 1996 document, however, shows the first steps towards rapprochement from the side of Cap. I quote: "At Cap, we put a lot of emphasis on difficulties with the city, OCMW. Instead, we should look for ways to have

a good relationship with the government: come out of our stronghold – remain critical but constructive –, look for ways to have trust (possibly putting the word Church in the corner a bit)" (D5). Later in the text, Cap explicitly underscores that its Christian inspiration was not tied to any political affiliation. Rather than acting "from a power structure" like the city, it stated, "we must act out of love of neighbor" and "opt for the poor" (D5).

Challenges, however, persisted. On the one hand, the organization was "secularizing and pluralizing from within, in volunteers, cadres and clients alike" (D6). On the other, it remained "faced with a 'purple' majority that is dismissive of our ties to the Catholic pillar" (D6). In a 2003 meeting, therefore, four potential future strategies for Cap were foregrounded, each with their drawbacks and benefits. The first suggested to drop the Christian label. The second entailed reprofiling its Catholic identity. The third involved broadening its identity to more widely supported Christian values. The final was to rebrand itself as a pluralistic service, founded on an inspiration that would organically take shape through open dialogue and would start from diversity. The latter is where Cap eventually opted for, and which would become fertile soil for postsecular rapprochements between its member organizations. This decision, along with the one to remove the word "church" from Cap's name, took into consideration the following pluses and minuses:

> "+ Inspiration: testing motivation on its own relevance
> + "False" consensus is not a starting point; opposition to grey uniformity of globalization and consumerism
> + Exercise in modesty
> - Threatening to those who prefer to leave it all covered up" (D6)

Around 2004, the first non-Catholic organizations joined Cap, something which, according to a current staff member, considerably improved its image in the eyes of the City (I7). As mentalities depillarized and poverty issues complexified, moreover, the City gradually shifted towards a governance approach, stimulating collaboration with and between voluntary organizations. Eventually, a growing sense of complementarity resulted in a pragmatic rapprochement between Cap and the City, involving the allocation of funding. As a precondition, the City expected Cap to commit to its "structural vision" of poverty alleviation, which was based on fundamental, inalienable rights and geared towards emancipation of the people in poverty. In practice, this meant that Cap-organizations were asked to conduct their work "under protest", something which involved three tasks. First, although they were supposed to offer material support to the less fortunate (e.g. food

parcels, clothing), they should concurrently advocate for structural policy initiatives. This primarily involved identifying unmet needs or social problems and communicating them to policy makers. Second, rather than as an end in itself, they should view material aid as an entry for welfare users to claim their rights, come into contact with other welfare organizations and expand their social network. Third, in order to rationalize the welfare provisions and avoid overlap or shopping behavior, all organizations should limit their activities to a specific, assigned neighborhood.

4.2.2. Cap: Generating a postsecular space?

Over time, engagement with these governmental demands has generated ethical crossovers, both among the welfare organizations themselves and in the Cap-City relationship. These rapprochements, I suggest, have been constituted around the intimate entanglement of four elements, namely “rights”, “hope”, “indignation” and “receptive generosity”.

First, at the heart of the Cap internal narrative has gradually grown a concept of rights in which humanist and religious ideas of human dignity smoothly coalesce. In particular, the basic ethical precepts of every Cap-initiative include “poverty is a social injustice” and “everyone has the right to a dignified life” (D7). Intricately entwined with this human-centered rights vision is an interplay of indignation –“It is unacceptable that people in our city of Ghent should live in poverty” (D8) - and hope –“the hope that everyone can enjoy all basic rights” (D8), “the hope that we should no longer exist” (D9, p. 8)-. Hope has been elucidated earlier as a sustaining force in religious and secular rapprochement (Holloway, 2012; Williams, 2015). In Cap, volunteers’ hopeful sensibilities, though tied to a variety of faith registers, produce a common “going-beyond-the-self” (Cloke et al., 2005) that is expressed in the attempt of jointly and persistently tackling the struggle for a just society in spite of mutual differences. This search for common ground has been best reflected in Cap’s vision statements, which represent an overlapping consensus of the elementary axioms all Cap-organizations can agree upon. All of them have been written jointly by their volunteers during meetings, a process of mutual translation in which “every little word was discussed” (I14) and which was not finished “until it was good for everyone” (I16). Central in this regard is an attitude of receptive generosity oriented toward “constructive cooperation” instead of “polemics about who offers the ideal help” (D11).

Thus, one could say, Cap can be considered a typical example of what Cloke and Beaumont have referred to as a “liminal space in which citizens are able to journey from the unshakeable certainties of particular world-views, with their extant comfort zones, to the unknown” (Cloke & Beaumont,

2013, p. 33). Crucial in this regard, however, is that no difference has been allowed when it comes to the very disposition of receptive generosity. With the City's criterium of non-discrimination in material aid as a motivation and the vision statement operating as a gatekeeper, Cap has only accepted those organizations which already display a certain openness. The question then remains to what extent this still leaves space for the organizations to profoundly transform mentalities.

This rights-indignation-hope-receptivity composite has shaped and was shaped by Cap's relationship with the City as well. The City/Cap relationship is described by both parties as a cooperative partnership characterized by healthy, constructive dialogue with room for criticism, and directed towards a common fight against poverty as an injustice: "There is nothing to lose. It is about standing up together for 13,000 people living in poverty: good cooperation is to their advantage" (I9). Besides the centrality of rights (it is the task of the City to ensure maximal access of every citizen to the fundamental social rights mentioned in Article 23 of the Constitution) and the importance of receptive generosity (in line with the non-discrimination clause), the City arguably shares with Cap an ethics of hope and indignation. This becomes visible, for example, in its tendency to provide aid to those whom it cannot help directly, for instance people without papers.

Overall, it can be argued, Cap represents an ideal typical case of postsecular rapprochement. However, as the short historical sketch of its relationship with the City has underscored, this rapprochement has been undergirded by strategical choices on both sides, influenced by power dynamics and macro-processes including depillarization, secularization and a complexifying social reality. Moreover, I will discuss in the following sections, the postsecular space created within Cap hides many experimental learning processes and struggles. The next link of the chain I will discuss is Cap's relation with Heart Community, an evangelical service that became a part of Cap around 2009. I will trace how Heart has attached itself to Cap's postsecular composite of rights-hope-indignation-receptive generosity throughout its history, yet always found itself in difficulty with the latter element. The purpose of this discussion is to show how volunteers have attempted to creatively handle this hurdle and, in the process, created fragments of theo-ethics and postsecularity. In order to provide insight into the dynamics underlying their postsecular rapprochement, I will start discussing this case at a point in time where there was no relationship with Cap yet.

4.3. Link two: Cap/ Heart, struggles over receptive generosity

4.3.1. Heart

The story of Heart begins at the turn of the millennium with a group of evangelicals and protestants raising the need to translate the Word into action. Time was right, they thought, since the recent closure of the local Salvation Army had left a void in the local protestant-evangelical solidarity landscape, leaving some vulnerable people in the cold. Starting from the idea of "soup, soap and salvation", Heart began by offering meals, organizing coffee tables, and selling second-hand materials, the ultimate end of which was bringing the needy towards faith. After the shop ended in disarray a year later, the organization radically moved away from the Protestant Salvation Army-strand to become fully integrated into the local Dutch-speaking evangelical community. One Dutch preacher called Hendrik saw it as his calling to take the lead, suggesting in his blog: "Perhaps we should look at whether we have made use of the opportunities we were given" (D10, 2000).

Looking for opportunities was exactly what Hendrik did from then on. In the following years, the number of congregations involved in Heart would increase to a dozen, primarily owing to his efforts in mobilizing the local Dutch-speaking churches, which were connected already through an informal group called "ILD" (Informal Leaders Discussion). During Sunday services, Hendrik would encourage them to provide financial support to Heart and recruit dedicated evangelical volunteers. Soon, a system emerged in which the churches took turns in offering their Sunday gifts. This worked in their advantage for at least two reasons. First, by uniting, the congregations hoped to enhance their image in the neighborhood, fulfilling the Biblical task articulated by Hendrik (D10, 2000): "…Our task is to be a curing salt that penetrates into the hearts. A city on a hill, you cannot look over it. Sourdough for society". Second, this arrangement enabled the churches to accomplish their "action" mandate alongside their mission of evangelization. As stated by a volunteer (I13), "providing shelter, giving food, offering clothing, those are things that are as important in loving the other as telling the Message, telling that Jesus died for their sins and that through Him they can have eternal life. Those two belong very much together, and that was an imbalance and it had to come back together". Where individual churches struggled for money, time and people to perform this action mandate, Heart stepped in, establishing a parachurch organization (I4, I5). In so doing, it became the center of a network of actors and beliefs facilitating the mobilization of resources, including a relatively predictable funding base, a forum for validating ideas and hopes, and a pool of volunteers, some of whom working as missionaries paid salaries by a church(network) abroad.

In the following years, Heart's provision of material help would remain secondary to its practice of explicit evangelization. Nevertheless, a gradual awareness grew that "the gospel of our Great Investor does not demand incidental, but structural care for the poor" and that "it is not enough to give to a

few charities, we must change social structures!" (D10, 2008). A driving force behind this discursive shift was the rise of international preachers advocating for new church models, most notably the New York-based priest Timothy Keller, whose apologetics further propelled a trend that was already unfolding within Heart. In his bestsellers "the Prodigal God" (Keller, 2008) and "Generous Justice" (Keller, 2010), the renowned pastor introduced justice as an intrinsically biblical command for generosity, opposing it to charity which he described as "a good but optional activity" (Keller, 2010, p. 15). Justice, in his view, is grounded in God's grace in Christ. Assuming that God encompasses all social relationships, it is innately social. This kind of justice moves beyond mere obedience but requires all humans to receive their due as divine creatures, especially the powerless with whom God identifies. Not much later, this discursive shift towards social justice would facilitate Heart's tie-up in Cap's repertoire of social rights.

At that time, indeed, Cap was looking for an organization to join in the area where Heart was partially active. Since no evangelically inspired organizations had yet joined the network, however, Cap wanted to ensure that its vision would align with theirs (D12). To that end, Heart volunteers were required to follow trainings on providing dignified assistance and remain "observing" Cap members during one year, meaning they had no decision-making role yet in the organization. In Heart, this step was presented as an "answered prayer", simultaneously enabling them to "tackle a major social problem on a professional level" and "give our congregations much more charisma" (D10, 2009). This pilot year became a delicate balancing act in negotiating differing ethics of care and exploring crossover narratives and practices. Implicitly, the focus of these negotiations revolved around the question of whether and how Heart could tie into Cap's postsecular composite.

First, Heart's eschatological hope in the manifestation of a Kingdom on earth and its indignation that it did not manifest yet, resonated well with those of Cap which were more grounded in a concept of rights. Secondly, the framework developed by Keller and the alleged Christian roots of rights served as the rationale for Heart to engage in that rights narrative, as stated by a volunteer: "In one sense you could say that universal human rights have torn themselves away from the Christian tradition (...) but then you could say that they have become a bit more concrete in the social rights and how the federal government and social centers deal with that, in order to find a way back to Heart in a practical sense" (I13). And yet, the evangelical ethos underpinning Heart's aid has been the main, and recurrent, bone of contention in the Cap-Heart relationship. Whereas Cap rejected the idea of people in poverty being approached by volunteers whose prime motivation was "earning their heaven" (I9, also D12), Heart posed itself the following questions: "Do we want to coordinate that with another group, a broad

group with other motivations, or do we lose ourselves in it? (...) Is the freedom there or are we not allowed to say anything anymore about faith ever or the Christian inspiration behind it" (I15)? As I will discuss later, Heart volunteers' difficulty to display a full openness towards the beliefs of their recipients – in other words, their struggle in embodying receptive generosity - is what has hindered the development of a fully-fledged postsecular rapprochement with Cap.

During this first year, a crossover arrangement was established connecting Cap's goal of offering a social network to the recipients to Heart's specific assets in this regard. A Heart volunteer recalls how both parties brainstormed about Heart's approach: "We thought of what was not there yet (in Cap) and what our strengths were, what could we do? For example, we had a limited building and storage space, but we did have a network of people" (I15). Through dialogue, it became apparent that Cap's integral approach to poverty alleviation resonated well with Heart's primary asset, namely its central role in a network of evangelical actors. Consequently, a "buddy system" was developed in which each needy person or family would be assisted by a Heart volunteer (a "friend in need") who would offer not only material, but also psychological and social support, all from the idea that "one gets further if one has someone to really walk the road with than if one comes and just picks up something material" (I14).

After the first year, therefore, both parties agreed that Heart would become a fully participating member of Cap, thus formally imbricating an evangelical network into a well-established urban welfare mix. In concrete terms, this meant that Heart would henceforth receive (limited) funding from the City via Cap and in return assist individuals referred by the local public social center.

In the following years, however, Heart hit rock bottom. Not only did Hendrik, one of the key driving forces, fall ill, but internal struggles over its vision and future led to a substantial drop-out of volunteers, coinciding with a low point in one of the main supporting churches. Just when plans were made for simply dismantling the whole Heart operation in 2015, a highly educated pastors couple stepped in giving the organization a new lease of life. Since then, Heart's discourse and public image have evolved extensively, primarily drawing on Cap's repertoire of social rights. These new leaders seemed to turn Heart into a liminal space for "buddies" (i.e. the name given to Heart's volunteers), "buddy-friends" (i.e. the name given to Heart's receivers) and members of the broader (faith) network to join Cap and the City in experimentally reflecting on poverty across faith boundaries.

4.3.2. Three techniques in navigating expectations

This did not fully resolve the tensions around Heart's evangelical ethos, however. A volunteer captures the struggle very well: "I think that together we are very much looking for ways to be very creative and very subtle in pointing to Jesus without disrespecting the intention of Cap, without feeling that that is a condition for getting that help. But…we do want to make clear in one way or another that we have that in common, we want to do this because Jesus loves us, because Jesus loves you" (I13). Three techniques can be discerned in Heart volunteers' attempts to navigate the expectations of Cap and the City. These, I suggest, gradually generated a further postsecular repositioning of Heart's discourse and praxis.

The first is volunteers' tendency to avoid directly speaking about God, but to "work with one's hands to make people look heavenwards" (D10 2016, I13). Behind this lies the idea that living out God's love will prompt receivers to ask questions. Such faith embodiment entangles with the belief that "God saves and we don't" (I3). Hendrik in this regard advocated from his sickbed: "Don't force your ministry. Pray for wisdom" (D10 2016)! This strategy reflects a hybrid ethos which ambiguously marks a certain openness to difference, yet displays no genuine willingness to let go of the hope that the Other would eventually receive the wisdom to convert (Cloke et al., 2005). In Heart, such hybrid ethics materialize in intimate relationships of mutual learning between givers and receivers. They trigger the blurring of dogma to praxis, which has been considered a fertile ground for the development of postsecularity and postsecular rapprochement (e.g. Herman et al., 2012).

A second technique lies in the social network-building objective of Heart's buddy-system. First, its intensive character aimed at creating an equality-based friendship between givers and receivers allows volunteers to refer to God outside Heart's official confines. Second, by involving the receivers in a social network that is primarily composed of the faith community itself, volunteers discovered an implicit means of tying the desire to speak about God to Cap's aim of fostering network formation as part of the right of social self-development. As suggested by the former Cap coordinator, however, this same relational constellation may as well unlock spaces of conversation for deconstructing conventional faith boundaries and, in the process, create fragments of postsecularity (I16).

Third, Heart's new leaders strategically use language in order to uphold internal cohesion while simultaneously being able to reach out to Cap. Over time, they have created an "incredible vision" (I9) which closely aligns with Cap's ideas and even moves beyond them. In particular, the buddy system has allowed Heart's new leaders to detect and pass on more policy signals than other Cap services, thereby preserving its public image and eclipsing internal polyvocality. Moreover, they have

engaged in "code switching" (McNamee, 2011), staging a legitimate rights-based discourse in interaction with external partners and adopting a more evangelical-inspired vocabulary internally. Whereas Lonergan and colleagues would interpret such ambiguity as a "dual register" and therefore not as a ground for genuine rapprochement, the two leaders simply perceive these two speech codes as alternative ways of expressing the same concerns, thus as a form of Habermasian translation (Lonergan et al., 2021). In so doing, they have tried to spill over their rights-based narrative onto the volunteers.

Regarding the children's club, for instance, the question was raised as to what extent the use of Christian language could exclude children from different backgrounds. Volunteers wanted to tell Biblical stories to the children, but the following question was raised: "Can we do that? (…) We have to be very careful with what we say because we are not allowed to evangelize openly" (I6). The volunteers then collectively came up with the following solution, Suzanne says: "We specifically made our lessons to be a bit more general, I would say, so, just about showing 'love', or, gosh, what have we, about 'joy' and those kinds of things. So we don't just say 'and Jesus says and Jesus says'" (I6). While Suzanne views such translated language as an inclusive means of communicating the teachings of Jesus, especially to those children who lack easy access to them – thus as a tool for evangelization –, its compatibility with other faith narratives might at the same time become a soil for postsecular rapprochement (Chapman & Hamalainen, 2011).

Taken together, Heart has been among the first evangelical groups in Flanders to integrate into a well-established urban welfare mix. It has tied its activities to Cap's processes of postsecular rapprochement, using the latter's central position in the local welfare fabric to "break out of its previous position of being 'hushed up' in the public sphere" (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, p. 41). While fragments of postsecularity did gradually trickle down in the process, this has been laced with mechanisms of power pressuring Heart to abandon its very motivation, namely spreading God's love. In its search for creative ways to reconcile this contradiction, however, evangelical love concepts were slowly transformed. The following sections will discuss how a small, marginalized church has become a part of this trapped interaction structure as well, contributing to the creation of what I call a stretched postsecular rapprochement.

4.4. Link three and four: Heart/ Dutch-speaking/Twi-speaking Church of Christ, touching hybrid welfare concepts

The third link of the chain, indeed, is the liaison between Heart and one of its supporting churches, the Church of Christ. This small church stands out for its dual composition, comprising both a Dutch- and a Twi-speaking segment. Through its engagement in ILD and its informal connection to Heart, the church has become involved in joint discussions over Heart's receptive generosity. Analyzing these relationships allows us, on the one hand, to uncover the challenges faced by some groups in making their voices heard, especially when confronted with postsecular expectations. On the other, it demonstrates how marginalized actors can still be included in and contribute to a process of stretched postsecular rapprochement.

The Church of Christ was established in 2003 as a daughter church of another Church of Christ in Flanders, which was planted by American missionaries. After gathering in the pastor's house for some years due to difficulties in securing an affordable place, the church members now worship in a school building; the Dutch-speaking group in the canteen and the Twi-speaking group in the gymnasium. Such dual structure is highly exceptional in the Flemish evangelical landscape where Dutch-speaking and non-Dutch speaking churches have, over time, developed their informal networks entirely separately. Before addressing this relationship, I examine the association between Heart and the Dutch-speaking group.

Although crossovers do take place between the beliefs of Heart and the latter, my point is not that this relationship is marked by postsecular rapprochement in itself. Rather, I argue, the Dutch-speaking segment makes use of and ties into Heart's rapprochement with Cap and the City in two ways. First, it benefits from Heart's infrastructure to broaden its network and support local people in need. The pastor and his wife, both missionaries paid by a US Church of Christ, are the only church members able to devote their time to the task of performing love of neighbor. Heart constitutes a convenient channel in this respect, the pastor argues: "If I want to think missionary, then I should think 'How can I communicate with the people who live here, who are around the corner'. (...) So that also comes with Heart" (I11). Moreover, being the center of a network of beliefs, actors and resources, Heart provides an opportunity to achieve a goal shared by Churches of Christ worldwide, namely uniting Christians of all sorts: "We may not be in complete agreement with them theologically, but helping people is more important than dotting all the i's in terms of theology", the pastor says (I10).

Second, the arrangement causes the church to get in touch with and affect hybrid concepts and practices of welfare as they circulate and transform across the chain. Besides prayer, donation and volunteering, the pastors support Heart through their participation in ILD, which serves both as the

space for Heart to justify its decisions towards supporting churches and as a platform for collective reflection on ethical questions. Within this discursive arena, discussions often revolve around the challenges encountered by Heart in assigning an appropriate role to God within Cap's confines. Due to the hybrid discourse of Heart's leaders, these debates have generated receptivity to the point that most of the churches agree that "the contacts, the chance to help and the value of that exceed the few chances to evangelize" (I10). In sum, emergent postsecularity has worked as an attractive force for the Dutch-speaking segment to tap into, providing an avenue for the development of a local network in a legitimate manner. Simultaneously, it has led to the church's entanglement in the chain of travelling welfare concepts and the relations of power governing them.

The Ghanaian group encounters greater challenges in establishing such connections. Because of language and cultural differences, the group heavily relies on the Dutch-speaking group in forging local relationships, as explained by a Twi-speaking church member: "When the communication is problem, it's difficult for you to, how you call it, contact with people is not so easy. So, in a Nederlands, if we found somebody who is interested in worshipping, all we do is, okay, we connect Marc, so that Marc can help them" (I2). The group, being young and composed of first-generation migrants, struggles with the role of religion in the Belgian public sphere, as the Dutch-speaking pastor tells me: "Connecting with the neighborhood or with the City is something that I think can be useful to have a voice. For them, having a voice is just being loud sometimes" (I1). The involvement of the Dutch-speaking group in local bodies provides an opportunity for the Ghanaian group to slowly acquaint themselves with local concepts and structures of welfare, however reluctantly and preliminary. In so doing, they too form to some extent part of what I perceive as a "stretched" form of postsecular rapprochement, in which multiple levels of interaction learn from each other at different paces and in proportion to their resources. In the Cap/Heart/Church of Christ chain, such mediated mode of rapprochement has evolved around the elements of rights, hope, indignation and receptive generosity, the latter of which proved the most demanding. This constellation has allowed to bridge faith and other divides and achieve convergence around the common concern of fighting poverty.

4.5. Conclusion

By identifying crossovers of discourse and praxis among a chain of four welfare actors in the Ghent local welfare mix, this chapter has shed light on a "stretched" form of postsecular rapprochement in which faith and other divides are overcome through a mediated structure. Such structure, I have shown, allowed welfare actors to engage in processes of translation and learning according to their own rhythms and resources, causing welfare concepts and practices to affect each other and gradually

transform. Rather than by a "bubbling up of ethical values" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 3), these processes of postsecular repositioning were governed by strategical choices and broader power dynamics, including mental depillarization and disorganization. They thus found themselves in a constant state of motion and negotiation. Stretched postsecular rapprochement, in this respect, can be considered emblematic of those secularized and disorganized welfare settings where young faith traditions grapple with finding their position.

This pattern carries potential in two ways. First, it might bring us closer towards the realization of a postsecular society as envisaged by Habermas, one marked by complementary learning between different faith groups, contributing to the creation of a wider sense of solidarity. Second, its occurrence in disorganized welfare mixes combining different actors and worldviews might help us better address the complex social problems created by an ever more chaotic social reality. Stretched postsecular rapprochement, indeed, enables harnessing all the resources available to address the shared concern of poverty, including those of more marginalized welfare actors that would otherwise experience difficulty in connecting to the regular welfare landscape.

And yet, this case study has shown not only that postsecularity can expand itself to include less powerful voices, but also that it might function as a disciplinary force, placing a burden on them to transform. It is essential, in this respect, to remain aware that such multilayered dynamics of learning also inevitably come with struggles and mechanisms of exclusion.

Chapter 5: Parallel moral economies

5.1. Intro

Over the last decades, pentecostalism has exploded in the global south, where its promise of material wealth and health has cushioned the absence of formal safety nets (Chesnut, 2012; Davis, 2013). Much less is known about its role in places with comprehensive welfare regimes, like Europe. Although many of the churches planted in Europe were driven by the will to re-Christianize the spiritually dead continent, few have succeeded in attracting members beyond their own ethnic group (Burgess, 2020). It is known, moreover, that many transnational Pentecostal churches function as self-sustaining and self-reproducing structures, replicating the same models wherever they are planted.

Drawing on an examination of the solidarities exercised by two African-initiated Pentecostal churches in Antwerp and Ghent, this chapter discerns a second evangelical-secular pattern within the Flemish welfare landscape. I call this pattern "parallel moral economies", referring to those religious and secular welfare grammars that are constructed alongside rather than in co-production with each other. In both churches under study, I will demonstrate, Pentecostal solidarity is built in fierce opposition to what is presumed as "secular" or "evil". Both, in this respect, employ the image of a secular Belgium as a means of reaffirming the power of God, thus reproducing a strict secular-religious dichotomy which neither stems from nor generates dialogical engagement with secular welfare actors. In the first church, I will show, this translates in the creation of a system of social mobility independent of state provisions, in which accomplishments of once-marginalized church members are viewed as triumphs of the religious over the secular. In the second, it causes successful OCMW interventions to become incorporated as divine miracles.

The chapter will proceed as follows: First, I will introduce the concept of "moral economy" and justify my use of it. Second, I will discuss the prosperity gospel as a belief system that has recently been incorporated by Pentecostal churches around the globe, and which highly informs the moral economies of both churches under study. Third, I present and analyze the first church, starting with its origins in post-colonial Lagos, Nigeria. Fourthly, I elaborate on the second case, after shortly situating the church's early days in Accra, Ghana. I conclude by formulating two hypotheses explaining the disparity between the two churches, and reflecting on the "parallel moral economies" pattern.

5.2. Moral economy?

"Moral economy" has gained widespread currency in the social sciences over the last decades. Usually, the phrase is used to refer to those economic activities or systems which mark some degree of concern for values beyond mere profit. This, however, assumes a narrow understanding of the notion "economy" as being solely market-driven, and is not how I wish to use the term. By contrast, I endorse the substantivist view of economy adopted by James Carrier drawing on Polanyi, namely as the production and circulation of things (Carrier, 2018). "Moral economy" in this regard underscores the way in which morals, norms and values inevitably regulate and structure economies including welfare regimes, and are reinforced or altered by them themselves (Mau, 2004; Sayer, 2007, p. 262). Morals, in this sense, are among the very things produced and circulating in economies.

From this perspective, some scholars have argued, all economies could be considered moral, making the term obsolete. While I agree with this critique to some extent, I also believe that speaking of "moral" economies provides a window to shed light on their normative dimension. Thus, rather than employing the term to claim that the churches' welfare regimes or solidarities are more defined by morals than others', I use it to underscore the fundamental role of their moral dimension in shaping their relation to established secular welfare actors like OCMWs – which, too, are part of a moral economy basically rooted in reciprocity between citizens within national borders (Mau, 2004). In particular, I will argue, it is precisely through religious-inspired ethics and morals that the solidarities of these churches distinguish themselves from and set themselves against the "secular", creating a moral economy parallel to that of the formal welfare regime. In the next sections, I will show how that happens. First, I wish to introduce the belief system that informs the moral economies of these churches' solidarities, which is the prosperity gospel.

5.3. The prosperity gospel

The roots of the modern prosperity gospel – also known as the health-and-wealth gospel, the gospel of success, Word of Faith theology, neo-Pentecostalism or the seed faith movement –, trace back to the late 19th century United States. Usually, its development is tied to three traditions: New Thought, Pentecostalism and the American celebration of individualism and upward mobility (Bowler, 2018; Coleman & Lindhardt, 2020). New Thought, a 19th century spiritual movement inspired by a variety of sources, fundamentally revolves around the principle of Mind-Power which involves viewing the material world as a manifestation of the mind. According to historian Kate Bowler, the movement quickly found connection with the then newly born Pentecostal Movement which, despite its orientation to an eschatological future, saw the material body as the locus of holy action. Soon after the first people in Azusa Street were speaking in tongues, prominent Pentecostals had already adopted

New Thought elements, initially directed towards healing, later toward manifesting prosperity more generally. This new combination bloomed in the WWII-period, culminating as the prosperity gospel in post-1960 America. In the 1970s, which marked a spectacular surge in televangelism, renowned charismatic preachers like Oral Roberts, A.A. Allen and Kenneth Hagin spread the prosperity gospel through mass broadcasting. So it happened that the prosperity message made its way to Africa and South America in the 1980s (Gifford, 1990).

The basic principles of the prosperity gospel are quite simple. Like New Thought, it views the material and spiritual realm as intrinsically connected, with the former responding to changes in the latter. Accordingly, the deeper one's faith in the Holy Spirit, the greater his/her/their blessings will be, including financial wealth, fertility, health and family luck. True faith in this regard is considered "a power that unleashes spiritual forces and turns spoken word into reality", evidenced by abundant wealth (Bowler, 2018, p. 7). This, however, does not render the moral value of wealth unambiguous (Deacon & Lynch, 2013). Since many prosperity preachers recognize not only the forces of God, but also those of Satan, the meaning attributed to wealth is enmeshed in a dichotomous worldview where it can be acquired either by Satanic or Holy means. This dualistic worldview, moreover, serves as the foundation for the all-pervading cosmic struggle of neo-Pentecostals against the demonic, the evil and the secular, commonly referred to as "spiritual warfare".

A key instrument in sustaining the spiritual warfare project is the "Born-Again" concept, referring to one's condition after being baptized in the Holy Spirit, marking a clear rupture with a secular, unholy past. Whereas in older forms of Pentecostalism, the change in ethical conduct tied to new birth was aimed at success in the afterlife, it now also includes "the possibility of material change in everyday life" (Marshall, 2009). This transition, according to anthropologist Ruth Marshall, has been undergirded by a significant shift in eschatology which increasingly situates salvation in this world while relegating belief in Christ's return and the afterlife to a secondary position.

True faith can be expressed and demonstrated by three acts. The first is positive confession or the "name it and claim it" principle: when spoken in faith, words of prayer are believed to activate blessings. The second is giving and donation, including offering tithes (10% of a member's earning) to the church and helping others in need. A central principle in this regard is divine reciprocity or "seed faith", suggesting that a faithful gift is a seed which will grow and return in unexpected and multiplied ways, as miracles. This does not entail endorsing laziness, however. The third way to

evidence faith is through hard work, which is believed to be rewarded by God in the form of exceptional promotions and financial returns.

Recently, scholars have begun to conceptualize the prosperity gospel as a spectrum, with an older, miracle-oriented version on the one side and a new form which sacralizes self-help and celebrates consumption on the other (Cornelio & Medina, 2020; Medina & Cornelio, 2021). Whereas the older prosperity message primarily emphasizes giving and positive confession, the new version, also called the "prosperity ethic", "expects its followers to adopt practical skills related to investment and financial management" (Medina & Cornelio, 2021, p. 65). The two churches I will analyze find themselves at a different position on the spectrum. This, I will suggest later, affects the way in which they construct their parallel moral economy. In the next section, I will take a closer look at the first church, which is a branch of a mega-church that originated in Nigeria. I begin by briefly discussing the mother church it is tied to, namely the "Redeemed Christian Church of God" in Lagos.

5.4. Fountain of Life, Antwerp

5.4.1. The Redeemed Christian Church of God

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is currently one of the world's most "mega" churches, widely considered the "arrowhead" of Nigerian Pentecostalism (Adeboye, 2007). The church was founded in 1952 in Lagos by Josiah Olufemi Akindolie, after having received a divine vision. Initially, RCCG blended Aladura (i.e. indigenous Christian) and Pentecostal characteristics, including classic holiness (i.e. a stress on strict personal ethics), praying, speaking in tongues, belief in miracles and healing. It prescribed rigid rules, prohibiting women from wearing jewelry or makeup, restricting their involvement in leadership roles, and denouncing electronic instruments as well as the pursuit of wealth and prosperity (Ukah, 2003). As Enoch A. Adeboye became the new RCCG leader or "General Overseer" in 1981, however, some of these pietist rules were relaxed (Adeboye, 2007, p. 40). Most notably, Adeboye liberalized the style of worship by introducing electronical instruments and allowing believers to dance and express themselves freely. Aligning with a global trend within Pentecostalism, moreover, he increasingly stressed prosperity alongside holiness. These changes eventually culminated in the creation of "the model parish" in 1988, a church type designed to attract young, upwardly mobile people (Ukah, 2003). Unlike the classical holiness parishes, the model parish was led by a young charismatic English-speaking professional and settled in worldly places like cinemas, hotels or night clubs, which were furnished with colorful tapestry and modern technologies.

From the 1990s onwards, RCCG membership exploded, arguably owing to the model parish and the "visionary leadership" of Adeboye (Adeboye, 2017). This was fueled by the following mission statements, which have been consistently reiterated in all parishes, whether classic or model:

> "To make heaven."
>
> "To take as many people with us."
>
> "To have a member of RCCG in every family of all nations."
>
> "To accomplish No. 1 above, holiness will be our lifestyle."
>
> "To accomplish No. 2 and 3 above, we will plant churches within five minutes walking distance in every city and town of developing countries and within five minutes driving distance in every city and town of developed countries."
>
> "We will pursue these objectives until every Nation in the world is reached for the Lord Jesus Christ" (official website RCCG, accessed on 15 March 2023).

These mission statements have resulted not only in a meteoric rise of parishes across Nigeria, but also in the proliferation of all kinds of social services making up for the failure of the state. Amongst others, RCCG owns primary and secondary schools, a university, banks, health centers, hospitals, a satellite television and a printing press (Adeboye, 2007; Adedibu, 2023). Most notably, the church runs "Redemption Camp", an RCCG city built a stone's throw from Lagos. As stated by sociologist Kim Knibbe, Redemption Camp "appears as an oasis of 'development' in the middle of a country marked by collapse, rusted out vehicles and potholes that can swallow a whole car" (Knibbe, 2010, p. 5). The RCCG, she argues, "has created a space in which the sacred, the secular, the political and the religious are all merged into one type of subjectivity that is continually in development and that has become a shared project embodying truth and values that are in sharp contrast with Nigerian society". Knibbe points to the following paradox however: While the RCCG's success hinges on the continuous collective and individual rupture assumed by the Born Again experience – as reflected in the spatial practice of building a separate city –, the RCCG has become so influential that it is now enmeshed with the same political corruption it has repudiated. Indeed, since the late 1990s, the church in general and Redemption Camp in particular has become a magnet for the emergent political class to campaign from the pulpit and advance their political trajectories (Ukah, 2014).

The effects of number five in the mission statement have not halted at Nigerian borders. Rather, it propelled the spread of RCCG "to the ends of the earth", as foreseen in Josiah's divine vision (Adeboye, 2007, p. 47). From the 1990s onwards, the RCCG has exported its religious commodities and spiritual battles to all corners of the world, including the former missionary continent Europe

(Adedibu, 2023). Over the last decades, this has created dense and polycentric trans-urban church networks, marked by the continuous circulation of spiritualities and resources, including itinerary pastors, financial flows and spatial knowledge (Beeckmans, 2019b; Knibbe, 2009). In the case of RCCG, such transnational or -urban social field is nested within a complex hierarchical structure of authority (Knibbe 2009), with on top of the pyramid the General Overseer Adeboye, internationally headquartered in Redemption Camp, and under him, a stratified set of functions including the Mother-in-Israel, the Elders, the Secretaries, the Directors, the Provincial, Zonal, Area and Parish Pastors, the Deacons, the ministers, the workers, the faithful and the visitors (Ukah, 2003, p. 104). In accordance, RCCG space is divided into regions, provinces, zones, areas and parishes.

Since the new millenium, Flemish cities have been included as fibers in the RCCG grid, where parishes constitute "important nodes of self-organization" and function as "arrival infrastructures" for newcomers (Beeckmans, 2020, p. 257; Blommaert, 2011). Despite being considered "a social force" (Burgess, Knibbe, & Quaas, 2010), little is known about their role in local welfare landscapes. The following case study of an RCCG model parish in Antwerp provides a starting point in filling this gap. It illustrates the religious-secular pattern I call "parallel moral economies", in which a religious welfare actor encapsulates its solidarity from other moral economies, for instance through the continuous reproduction of a secular-religious dichotomy. More specifically, I will show how the evangelical prosperity ethics of this church resonate with its local environment in ways that *prevent* postsecular rapprochement with other welfare actors and rather generate its own structure of upwards mobility. I will argue that this parallel moral economy is sustained through the techniques of prayer, giving and hard work.

5.4.2. Fountain of Life, RCCG Antwerp

It was 2002 when a young Nigerian family arrived in Antwerp after leaving their lives in London. A little earlier, God had shown the woman a vision of "a city under construction" (D16), interpreted by her husband as a calling to bring the gospel to Belgium, "a dying nation desperately in need of the breath of Gods life" (D16, p. 105). Being Born-Again RCCG members since their adulthood in Nigeria, the couple soon founded a small church in the city's outskirts, which they called "Fountain of Life" (FoL). Although their objectives aligned well with a rhetoric of reverse mission, advocating to bring the gospel back to the children of those missionaries who once took it to Africa, the first members were Nigerian women in prostitution and Nigerian men hanging around in the streets. In a book years later, the pastor would describe what happened in this starting phase as follows: "We took a stroll round town asking the Lord to show us what we needed to know. We started by meeting a

few people and we found out a prevalent trade among the Africans there. It was prostitution and pimping" (D16, p. 108).

From the beginning, one could say, FoL has addressed the gaps left by the state. The prostitution area in Antwerp at the time was not regulated. Human trafficking networks abounded, and those caught in prostitution were exploited by their pimps and madams while unaware of their social rights (Loopmans & Van Den Broeck, 2011). Not seldom, they were Nigerian women, tied to their pimps through voodoo oaths and debts. The young church group, then, would go to the red-light districts and tell the women about the Holy Spirit. In interviews, the pastor and his wife explain what prompted them to do so: "Because Jesus Christ gives you freedom, deliverance, and liberty from slavery, and we felt that they were doing it against their will, the girls" (I18). A volunteer at one of the few other organizations active there at the time recalls their presence and their ability to find connection to the women, saying "If you are a social worker with no affinity at all, then there is a distance between the two (…) Now, the women were like, 'ah that's a pastor and there's a bit of authority there'" (I22). The first following in FoL thus emanated from this group of vulnerable women, often sans-papiers with no network and no hopes. The pastors, who gradually managed to help them out of their entrapment, would gladly use this accomplishment in the coming years to sustain the church's moral economy underpinned by prosperity and spiritual warfare. As I continue telling the story of FoL through snippets of interviews, discourse and fieldwork, I will unpack this complex knot of beliefs, dispositions and practices that led FoL to create its own structure of upwards mobility free from secular influences.

5.4.3. Creating upwards mobility

"The Word was coming like a hammer and sharp arrow piercing the hearts of the people", the pastor writes about his early days as a pastor in Belgium (D16, p. 108). He continues by crediting the church's success in breaking the myth of voodoo that was holding the women in captivity (although sharing roots, RCCG churches reject occult practices linked to traditional Yoruba culture, like voodoo). He writes: "Soon the testimonies started manifesting. The women soon started taking God seriously. Many deserted their pimps and risked deportation and hunger for the sake of Jesus. A lot took up cleaning jobs and some decided to be eating once a day instead of defiling their bodies for a mess of pottage. What a victory from the Lord!" (D16, p. 110-111). Then there were the men, who spent their days on the streets dealing drugs and committing credit card fraud. According to the Pastor's wife, a lot of these men as well gave their lives to Jesus and left drugs and crime (I20). The pastor would later explain: "There was a major shift in the spirit that affected the physical" (D16, p. 111). The women started to get married. The men started retraining via the church's courses, which included computer

training, project management and business analysis. With their certifications, some moved to America, to Canada or the UK, while some stayed doing "good jobs" (I18) and buying houses instead of renting them. Any problem, so it seemed, was to be resolved by faith, for instance: "When our girls started getting married, we found out that some could not bear children because their wombs had been affected because of their past. We went to the Lord and He promised us through His word, a baby boom. That year alone, we had over 50 children born in the church", the pastor writes (D16, p. 114).

For the women and men in question, accepting the church's help and gaining access to this moral economy which seemed to generate prosperity and happiness implied to subject themselves to and transform themselves through the church's project of New Birth. This involved radically departing their immoral past and converting into newly disciplined, hard-working and faithful selves, a process which involved a re-articulation of their ethics, emotions, aesthetics and actions (Marshall, 2009). Central to this newborn subjectivity is the disposition of individual self-worth. FoL, in this respect, has been presented as "the place where everybody is somebody" (D19). Similar messages have been reiterated in church services and YouTube videos, in phrases like the following: "The Bible says: You are a peculiar person. Each person is created peculiarly for a particular task" (D17). This focus on the self has been associated with the duty to perform the task one was created for: "The Kingdom of God is like a business and if you're not useful to it, God does not owe you anything. God expects you to bring value to His Kingdom. The more you add value to the Kingdom of God, the more God adds to you, so that you can bring more value" (D18). Hence, commitment to self-worth and self-labor has become tied to this-worldly salvation, and wealth and health became indicators of morality and faithfulness (Krause, 2015).

The process of upwards mobility has applied not only to the once marginalized church members, but also to the church itself. Over the years, the pastor has become a great example of his own rhetoric. Most notably, he has worked his way up in the RCCG hierarchy to become a "provincial pastor" in charge of RCCG in three countries, he made RCCG a recognized denomination in Belgium, and he travelled the world for his renowned healing programs. Moreover, after four years of renting run-down terraced houses on the edge of the city, the church bought its own big building, situated near the station, the ring road and several bus stops (see Knibbe, 2009 for a discussion on the importance of buying property for RCCG churches in West-European urban space).

5.4.4. The secular as a device in sustaining the Born-Again rupture

Several scholars have argued that the central question is not how to *become* Born-Again, but how to *remain* it (De Witte, 2011; Krause, 2015; Marshall, 2009). Ruth Marshall writes: "Becoming Born-Again is an event of rupture, but being Born-Again is an ongoing existential project, not a state acquired once and for all, a process that is never fully achieved and always runs the risk of being compromised" (Marshall, 2009, p. 131). Central in this undertaking, she argues, is the continuous re-creation of moral boundaries within a paradigm of spiritual warfare, establishing distinctions between the holy and the evil, the divine and the Satanic, the religious and the secular (also Krause, 2015; Meyer, 1998). This mechanism is well illustrated in my conversation with sister Gloria, the secretary of the church (I19).

> Gloria: "To leave Satan, I say you need to give your life to God. It's a battle."
> Lise: "It's a battle?"
> Gloria: "That you must fight."
> Lise: "And even when you already gave your life to God, you keep on battling?"
> Gloria: "Yeah, still, you battle until it's over. You have to fight because Satan wants you back. He can say, 'you have a contract with me', like you said oaths, and 'you took oaths and everything'. You have to break it with prayers, you know, you have to do fasting, you have to pray for all those things to be destroyed. When they are destroyed, then you are free from all those things. So that's why when you come to Christ, then you are a new creation. All the old things have passed away. The oldest oaths, you need to demise them. You need to reject them. You need to cancel them, so that they will not be working against you. So in church, this is the battles you go through, until you are free."

Within this system, I will argue, demonizing "secular" Belgium operates as a device to uphold the Born-Again rupture and sustain the church's parallel moral economy. Rather than through dialogical engagement with secular (welfare) actors, this demonization is produced and reproduced by the church itself. It does so, most notably, through the same three techniques by which it builds its system of upwards mobility, namely prayer, giving and hard work. In the following sections, I will shortly discuss the role of each in the construction of a parallel moral economy.

5.4.5. Prayer

"Above all, we pray. Prayer is the key, you know. Prayer is the master key. There's nothing you can do without the help of God. It's only God. No matter the amount of what you preach to people. It's God that will bring them to Him. So we always have to pray" (sister Gloria, I19).

Prayer is a crucial technique of self implied in the Born-Again conversion process, forming both an expression of one's faith (Mason, 2017) and a register through which faithful dispositions are re-enacted (De Witte, 2011; Holloway, 2012). In FoL, this continuous re-enactment contributes to the creation of moral boundaries around the church. It does so on two levels. First, church members pray together and for each other. This generates cohesion and belonging *inside* the church's "wall of virtue" (Maier & Coleman, 2011, p. 465) by underscoring the value of each individual believer in the face of God and the (transnational) church community (see Vásquez & Knott, 2014). Second, as in other West-European RCCG churches (Maier & Coleman, 2011, p. 465), prayer contributes to the perpetuation of an image of what is *outside* the church's walls: a land controlled by evil and secular forces; a nation in need of spiritual healing (D23). The subjects of these prayers include amongst others the "demonic forces" ruling Antwerp (D18), the atheism that is thriving among the "white people" (D20; D23), abortion and homosexuality.

Simultaneously, prayer is considered a weapon in this very battle, allowing believers to intervene with God and affect the course of events (see Fer, 2022, p. 1265). It has in this respect served as a substitute for obtaining compromises via mutual dialogue. In an interview, for instance, the pastor tells me he avoids direct engagement with formal instances or in politics because of their secularizing force, recalling what happened with Catholics in Belgium. Rather, he says, he would *pray* for solutions. When I ask Gloria whether she would rather communicate with God than, for example, with public authorities about the many legal rules she does not agree with, her answer is affirmative. "We don't go to confront situations", she says, "we *pray*". In sum, prayer serves as a crucial tool in FoL to establish and reproduce moral boundaries between the religious and the secular, and between the church and its local environment.

5.4.6. Giving

Another critical factor shaping FoL's parallel moral economy is the "law of exchange" or the principle of divine reciprocity. According to General Overseer Adeboye, giving is to be seen as a limited investment with unlimited returns. In FoL, the law of exchange undergirds the operation of two activities in particular: the welfare department and the practice of tithing.

5.4.6.1. The Welfare Department

FoL is organized in departments, including an Usher Department (taking charge of managing the church service), a Cleaning Department, a Translation Department, a Medical Department (taking

over the job of the family doctor by for instance measuring blood pressure and checking heart beats) and a Welfare Department. Having received a vision, the pastor's wife appointed sister Mary Grace as the head of the Welfare Department, after which she became the point of contact for church members in need to gain access to the food bank after church service on Sunday. Most of them do not qualify for any kind of benefits from the state. They are undocumented or unfamiliar with formal welfare infrastructure (I24). The foodbank serves as a first step in their process of upward mobility.

The first time I attended service in FoL, I was called up front together with a newly arrived Ukrainian refugee. The whole church clapped for us as we were warmly welcomed by the pastors. After service, the two of us were taken to the top floor of the building, where we were served a hot meal and given information about the church, including the food bank. In principle, the sister told us, the food bank is open to anyone, whatever their beliefs or backgrounds. In practice, users consist of church members only. This did not come as a surprise to me, considering the distribution's time and location.

Partly underlying the practice of distributing food in the name of Jesus is the belief that donating a pack of spaghetti will eventually get one a house, so to speak. The law of exchange informs the operation of the Welfare Department on two levels. First, for the individuals who assist in the operation of the food bank and support financially, it is supposed to result in individual blessings, as written by the pastor: "Your blessing is in helping people and Satan hates to see you being blessed" (D16, p. 138). Second, for the church, the food bank forms an indispensable vehicle in its belief system of prosperity. Not only, new church goers may perceive receiving free food as a gift dropped down from heaven, forming a first proof of God's power and a first blessing in the chain of mounting blessings to come, also it ensures perpetuation and (financial) growth of the church itself. As mentioned by the sister on the top floor: "Maybe the members in poverty don't contribute now, but later we hope for returns".

Rather than encouraging the church to seek cooperation with other welfare actors, the food bank serves as its legitimation not to do so. "What would they do for me?", the pastor explicitly answers when I ask him about the church's relations with other welfare actors: "We have a food bank ourselves" (I18). The food bank, moreover, is more than just a foodbank: although supposedly for everyone, using it and contributing to it means inserting oneself in the one type of subjectivity promoted by the church. In so doing, the food bank helps in creating a moral economy parallel to the local welfare landscape, continuously nurturing the belief that Jesus can turn the tide at any time.

5.4.6.2. Tithing

Strongly intertwined with the foodbank is the practice of tithing. In every service comes a point where those who pay their tithes must come to the front, dance and raise their blue envelopes in the air, while the rest of the churchgoers (few) remain seated and watch. Subsequently, depending on the time in the month, the whole church puts their offering and thanksgiving, respectively yellow and green envelopes, in the basket at the front while dancing. The event ends in a party, with everyone in the front joining in exuberant singing, dancing and praying. At first, I wondered what was so delightful about offering a tenth of one's salary while being poor and already paying taxes. But soon I understood that tithing follows a different logic, one that should be interpreted from the laws of the prosperity gospel. Sowing tithes means reaping blessings. According to the pastor, paying tithes means that "God will open the windows of Heaven for you" (I18). Moreover, the act of offering a sacrifice and publicly performing the ritual expresses and strengthens the believers' faith, which in turn is a mandatory ingredient for successful tithing – the pastor emphasizes that God is not "a supermarket" (D18). Tithing in this respect is a process of transformation for faithful, which, as Devaka Premawardhana writes, involves "insertion into or intensification of multiple relations of reciprocity with their church community, their God, and their distant loved ones" (Premawardhana, 2012).

Together with offerings (weekly) and thanksgivings (monthly), tithes (monthly) make up the budget from which the church building, the salary of the pastors, the food bank, scholarships and trainings are financed. Paying tithes is not obligatory, although for sister Kaylee and many others "it is an obligation from God's point of view" (I23). Tithing, in these ways, forms a central element in the church's moral economy promising ever-growing welfare.

The increasing emphasis on tithing as an explicit trade with God, it can be argued, signals a gradual shift away from a purely miracle-oriented prosperity gospel which inscribes itself in occult forms of power towards one that grants more sovereignty to the individual. As I will discuss now, this trend is epitomized by a major focus on hard work and, consequently, a dislike of "profiting" from formal and secular social safety nets.

5.4.7. Hard work: Be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28)

"God is raising a generation of Christians who will not mind about wealth and money but will work in such power of God that all they need will be running after them" (D21).

According to the pastor, it is not enough to wholeheartedly pray for financial blessings. In a sermon called "supernatural productivity", he emphasizes that what God truly blesses are works of the hands, especially the works one was uniquely created for (D23). While preaching, the pastor addresses one churchgoer in particular: "You're a truck driver. Why can't you go and do the exam so that you can have your license to own your own trucks so that other people will drive for you?" (D23). Endless such messages promote an individualized work ethic, underpinned by a religious belief that promises financial returns. Not only, these messages convey a deep aversion to laziness, also they picture financial failure as a marker of lack of self-labor and faith. In so doing, they have caused FoL church members to obtain degrees and pursue careers, and they constitute an important force behind the church's structure of upward social mobility.

This mindset, moreover, translates into a deep suspicion of dependence on the state's social security system. In church services, the pastor explicitly preaches against making use of state benefits. He tells me: "If you go to OCMW and live on OCMW, you become poor, because your mind is 'every month I'm gonna get 800 euros', so you plan in that" (I18). In contrast, he says, "I confront you, I tell you it's wrong, so most of my members who have papers to work, they go to work". The effect of this mindset becomes evident, for instance, in sister Kaylee's insecurity concerning this topic. Living on disability benefits, she struggles with maintaining this discourse without constantly justifying her own circumstances. "I have a certain monthly allowance, because it is difficult for me to work", she says, "but that is medically determined and everything. But there are people who are on unemployment or on sickness benefits. Why? Because they are lazy" (I23).

5.4.8. Conclusion

This section has shown how FoL, backed by a prosperity ethic and a paradigm of spiritual warfare sustaining the born-again rupture, constructs a moral economy parallel to the local welfare regime. It does so, I have argued, by creating its own structure of social mobility which is sustained through the techniques of prayer, giving and hard work. This tendency is not novel in RCCG branches. Rather, it mirrors the socio-political role of RCCG in Nigeria, where the church makes up for the failure and corruption of public authorities by providing an alternative economic and moral program. A similar form of encapsulation was identified, moreover, in an RCCG branch in London, where discursive fence-building formed the church's main means of dealing with the state in the area of child care (Maier & Coleman, 2011). This fence building, Maier and Coleman argued, spanned out to a stretched city-space they referred to as "London-Lagos" (Coleman & Maier, 2013; Maier & Coleman, 2011). Antwerp could easily be included in this transnational RCCG city-space or enclave.

The next part of this chapter will discuss the second church, namely a branch of "Miracle Church for all People" in Ghent. Again, I begin by shortly discussing the church's mother church, which is headquartered in Accra, Ghana.

5.5. Miracle Church for all People Ghent, Ghent

5.5.1. Miracle Church for all People

In the 1970s, a Born-Again revival took place in Ghana. This revival was marked by a strong focus on miraculous healing, merging African and Christian ideas of mystical causality (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005b). Although this miracle-centeredness long hindered these churches from becoming allies in Ghana's socioeconomic development (Gifford, 1994), recent scholarship nevertheless emphasizes their increased involvement in partnering the state and providing social services (Acheampong, 2018; Anquandah Arthur, 2021; Benyah, 2021; Owusu-Ansah & Adjei-Acquah, 2020).

Miracle Church for all People (hereafter MCaP) is among those neo-Pentecostal Churches that have become aware of their social duty. The church was founded in 1987 in Tamale, northern Ghana, by Francis Amoa (pseudonym) after having heard the voice of God saying: "My boy Francis, I give unto thee power over demons and principalities, heal the sick, raise the dead, preach the kingdom" (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005b). Since the relocation of the church's headquarters from Tamale to Accra in 1994, MCaP has witnessed spectacular growth. Currently, the church counts 106 parishes in the city of Accra and branches in 22 countries. The church owns a 14 000-seater auditorium in Accra, from which sermons and healing programs are broadcasted to every corner in the world (D24). Moreover, it has established a university, and preparatory and high schools all over Ghana.

Underlying these activities is a theology centered on total transformation and well-being, rooted in 3 John 2: "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (Owusu-Ansah & Adjei-Acquah, 2020, p. 152). According to Bishop Amoa, "this theology ensures that there is a constant cycle of development of both individual and society" (personal conversation of Owusu-Ansah & Adjei-Acquah, 2020, p. 217). Coming from a life of using hard drugs, chasing girls and night clubbing, the bishop presents himself as the living example of such Pentecostal transformation.

5.5.2. Miracle Church for all People Ghent

Since 2007, MCaP has established a branch in Ghent. Shuttling from Ghent to Amsterdam every Sunday to attend service, the pastor decided to plant a new church closer to his home. Initially gathering in living rooms, the community soon rented a terraced house located alongside a busy road and near a train station, various bus stops and numerous other Pentecostal churches. Despite maintaining a reverse mission discourse, the church became embedded in the local Ghanaian social fabric, fostering strong connections with other Ghanaian churches and shops which sell food in exchange for church publicity. The majority of the church members (around 60, although the number has shrunk during the period of lockdown) have Ghanaian backgrounds. While many of the elderly were born in Ghana, most of the youth were born and raised in Belgium. As the children grew older and it became apparent that "white people" were not naturally flowing in, the language used in service was switched from Twi to English. That did not change much, however: most of the new members still originate from Ghana or the diaspora. The church, in this regard, has functioned as their arrival infrastructure, offering a social network, mental and financial support, food and shelter when needed.

Miracle Church for all People Ghent addresses the gaps left by the state by, for instance, sheltering homeless newcomers. Nonetheless, it has not structurally engaged in dialogue with established welfare instances. Like FoL, so my argument goes, MCaP uses "the secular" as a device to perpetuate the Born-Again rupture and reaffirm the power of God within a paradigm of spiritual warfare. The way in which it does so, however, differs. While FoL creates a fully self-sufficient, state-free space for the provision of welfare to occur away from secular influences, MCaP encourages its members to make use of secular welfare services, incorporating their success as divine miracles. In the next sections, I will show how this dynamic is constructed.

5.5.3. "God is not religious": a total Born-Again subjectivity

Like in FoL, MCaP's discourse and praxis are underpinned by a dualistic worldview that sets the religious against the secular. Central in this respect is to create and sustain the Born-Again subjectivity, in Allan Anderson's words, a "heady and spontaneous spirituality"; one which is total in nature (Anderson, 2015, p. 95; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). Church member Emile, in this regard, warned me not to make him "put God in a box" with my questions: "God is not religious, you know" (I29). As a member of MCaP, Emile inhabits a cosmos that is alive with spirit powers, both evil and sacred. "God loves everyone, because He created everybody you know", he explains, "but we have forces, wicked forces rebelling against God, like a rebellion spirit, you know" (I29). In MCaP, more so than in FoL, humans are subject to the events taking place among the spirits: "They cannot manifest on their own, so they possess humans and try to go against the laws and the rules of God", Emile says

(I29). Carrying the Holy Spirit in their bodies, the Born-Again church members are designated to bring light to the world, as is regularly invoked in service (D25):

> Pastor: "You are a chosen generation. You are a royal Christian. You have a Holy mission. You are peculiar people. Hallelujah. God has called you and I out of darkness. He has called us from out of the world into His marvelous light... He has called us to show His Grace. So our coming here, is not just an accident... We have come here to praise God who has called us... It doesn't matter how people look at you"
> Public: "Amen".
> Pastor: "In the sight of God you are so precious. You are wonderful. You are powerful beings".
> Public: "Yes! (Applause and laughter)"
> Pastor: "Hallelujah"
> Public: "Amen!"

Although sharing a spiritual warfare and prosperity approach, FoL's and MCaP's parallel moral economies are constructed according to different logics. First, since MCaP finds itself on the older side of the prosperity spectrum, hard work takes a less central role in its moral economy. Rather, it is constructed via the techniques of prayer and giving. Second, unlike FoL, MCaP does not oppose reliance on "secular" structures and instances, like the OCMW. Instead, it views them as channels through which God may bless His people on earth. Behind this lies the belief that all divine blessings pass through human beings or man-made structures, as stated by the pastor: "God will not come from Heaven and drop money down, but he will use somebody to, you know to, to settle your cares for you" (I27). This dynamic neither emanates from nor creates dialogical and reflexive engagement with secular actors, however. Rather, it reinforces faith boundaries as it leads the church to incorporate successful secular state interventions in its own religious moral economy by categorizing them as miracles.

The following sections will discuss how the church creates its parallel moral economy through prayer and giving. Since these techniques work in tandem very much in MCaP, I will address them together. More specifically, I will examine two examples that illustrate this dynamic of incorporation. These include the practice of providing a bed to the needy in the church and the case of the Slovakians.

5.5.4. Sleeping in the church, giving to God

"This is recorded, so I want to be very careful with what I say", the church secretary Lara confides: "we can accommodate people" (I28). On top of the floor where service is held on Sunday is a bedroom, a kitchen, and a bathroom. Usually, this space is used to organize the children's activities. But now and then, the floor would serve as a temporary shelter for one or more church members in need until they find a better alternative. Mostly, the homeless members in question are undocumented, in which cases the church keeps utterly silent about this practice to prevent them from being deported back to Ghana. In other cases, the homeless are allowed to use the church's official address to initiate administrative state processes, including receiving state benefits or completing their process of obtaining papers. Sometimes, a social worker comes to check if everything is in order. For instance, in the case of two men who were in the process of obtaining papers, an assistant "would come and visit them and see if they are still living in the church", the pastor tells me. "They renewed their contract for three months, every three months" (I27). Hermine, a singer in the church choir, shares another example. In Leuven, she encountered a woman who had just given birth but could not find the father. Hermine decided to bring her to Ghent, saying: "you have to come to my church because we can give you help" (I30). Later, the church took her to the OCMW to see what they could do for her. Eventually, the OCMW helped her get her son, who was legally born in Belgium, into school. Meanwhile, they both slept upstairs in the church. This provided them with an address to arrange the mother's papers, which she ended up obtaining.

Underpinning these solidarity practices, I came to understand, is the belief that God uses the church as a tool to help/bless certain people. "God has already provided everything we need for us, but he will use man to be a blessing to somebody", says the pastor (I27). This belief causes church members to help people in need in spite of potential costs and risks, such as financial expenses for electricity and water, occasionally breaking the law and facing people who take advantage of this generosity. This going-beyond-the-self was explained by the pastor as follows: "When you give to people, you are giving it to God" (I27). Lara holds this same rationale: "So for example I have good work. My cousin in Ghana has no work. And she is struggling so much. I know, God gave me that work for a reason. To help myself of course, but also to help my cousin, or also to help people" (I28). Indeed, Emile argues "because the life given onto us is not ours, it is given onto us by God. So we have to do what He pleases" (I29). The same line of reasoning occasionally comes up in service as well, like this time (D26):

> Pastor: "Somebody has come to church and the person has a problem. Maybe the problem is not just to pray for the person. But it's a physical need. And then we just say 'go in peace'?"

Public: (laughter)

Pastor: "And we didn't show any love to the person by giving him something? Is this sure love? Hallelujah."

Public: "Amen!"

Pastor: "So the love is not just in theory. Hallelujah."

Public: "Amen."

Pastor: "It must go by action. Amen."

Public: "Amen."

Pastor: "... Cause He said, as you did to that person you did it to Me".

Not only, this logic serves as the motivation for the church to help people in need whatever their background, also it underpins its reliance on other instances. Within this rationale, secular welfare instances are considered divine tools too, tools which the church, being a tool in itself, may choose to employ or not. When I ask Hermine whether the church reaches out to formal instances for help, her answer is: "Yeah, it is fifty, fifty. We look at situations. That is what I am saying. We look at the situation. How practical it is. And then we work on God. We put our hands together and we come up with something" (I30).

Not seldom, church members tell me, reliance on these secular services works out. Regarding the two men who eventually obtained their papers, Emile says: "They got delivered… God listens. God does everything (I29)". Lara too believes there is something about the church that ensures that prayers and gifts are actually answered: "We always pray for people who have no papers, people looking for work, and it also happens that people effectively get papers and get work. (…) Otherwise we wouldn't be doing this, we couldn't have been going on for years while thinking, 'it won't work anyway'. If it wouldn't work, I think most people would have stopped believing" (I28).

Successful state interventions are usually interpreted by church members as miracles. Miracles, defined as supernatural interventions in the natural course of events, are ubiquitous in MCaP. They extend to the most mundane events, like the weather. Rather than being a state of exception, an MCaP miracle, much like the ones studied by Ruth Marshall , "opens the subject up to the experience of the divine in the everyday; to the experience of the mundane as miraculous, and the extraordinary as an event that may be expected, fated or willed" (Marshall, 2010, p. 214). Invoking miracles, Bosco Bangura has argued, forms a crucial means for African Pentecostals to cope with the complexities involved in the migration experience, providing an "anchor of stability in turbulent waters" (Bangura, 2018, p. 514).

And yet, one might as well argue, miracles form instruments to strengthen the church's moral economy and obstruct the church from creating a receptive generosity towards its local (secular) environment. By categorizing state interventions as miracles, the church erases their secular normative underpinnings, such as reciprocity based on national citizenship, thus impeding the chance for Pentecostal and secular moral economies to find resonance with each other. Entwined with this tendency, one can suggest, is the fact that the prime citizenship of most church members is not here on earth: "Our citizenship is in heaven. Hallelujah" (D27).

5.5.5. The Slovakians: "All of a sudden God did a miracle"

The case with "the Slovakians", as everyone in the church calls them, probably demonstrates this dynamic more clearly. One day, two Slovakian men came to church, saying they were in debt and their children were in need. Desperate for support, one of them asked the pastor for a loan of 100 euros. At that moment, the pastor gave them what he could, which was 50 euros. A few weeks later, the men returned asking for 200 euros. After a brief discussion with the secretary, the pastor quickly reached a conclusion: "Okay, let's give it to them, if they don't bring it, no problem, we have brought it to God" (I27). After this, the Slovakians and their families occasionally began attending church service and, eventually, they attended every week. In view of the church's purpose of getting as many white people into the church as possible, this in itself was perceived as a miracle. "Then", the pastor contends, "we started to pray for them, pray with them that God would make a way for them". Since the government had ceased providing them benefits for reasons unknown to the pastor, the Slovakians had been unable to pay their rent for an extended period. The pastor tells me: "We prayed and we prayed and then all of a sudden they came to understand that God has opened a door for them". He continues: "God did a miracle that day… the government paid them all the former money, they gave it to them." Some weeks later, the woman shared her testimony, expressing her joy with the entire community. Eventually, the Slovakians began convincing their families to come to church and convert. Concluding his story, the pastor turns towards me saying: "You see? Sometimes there are situations that is beyond your strengths and if you don't give it to God… He says 'I cast your cares upon me because I care for you'".

5.5.6. Conclusion

In this section, I have shown how MCaP Ghent builds a parallel moral economy through giving and prayer. It does so by incorporating successful secular state interventions as divine miracles, thus sustaining the Born-Again rupture and reaffirming the power of God in a world filled with secular darkness. This, I have argued, differs from the way in which FoL constructed its parallel moral

economy, namely through the creation of its own structure of upward mobility. Although a detailed analysis of these differences is beyond the scope of this chapter, I would like to offer some preliminary suggestions in the next sections, however.

5.6. Explaining the difference?

First, following a growing strand of literature applying Weber's Protestant Ethic to the Prosperity Gospel (e.g. Gifford & Nogueira-Godsey, 2011; A. Molendijk et al., 2010, p. 10), this disparity might be explained by their different position on the prosperity spectrum. While both churches adopt the basic premise of Prosperity, namely that true faith generates wealth and health, they differ in how they think true faith should be expressed. Whereas the first church follows a newer version of the prosperity gospel, placing an emphasis on self-help and hard work alongside prayer and giving, the second follows an older version mainly focusing on the latter two. This difference, in essence, touches upon an inherent tension ingrained in the (neo-)Pentecostal faith (Marshall, 2009): Who is granted more sovereignty, the believer or the supernatural? It is my hypothesis that the more a church tends towards the latter, the more it will be forced to rely on other structures and bet on miracles. Conversely, the greater autonomy a church assigns to the believers themselves, the more it will create its own system of social mobility separate from other structures.

Secondly, being part of transnational church networks, the difference might be ascribed to their mother churches' context of origin. FoL, on the one hand, arguably mirrors RCCG's role in Nigeria, where it acts as an alternative state structure and moral project, making up for the failure of a corrupt state through the promise of newbirth. MCaP Ghent, on the other, seems to adopt a similar role as it does in Ghana, where it increasingly acts as a partner of the state in its pursuit of socio-economic development and where its emphasis on miracles forms an asset in a highly competitive religious market (Appiah-Sekyere & Anderson Jnr, 2013; De Witte, 2008). This second hypothesis highlights the ways in which dynamics between religious and secular welfare grammars are inevitably affected by their historical configuration in other places. In this global era, local postsecularity, if any, will always be produced by dynamics from across the seas.

5.7. Conclusion

Adding to the dominant focus on the Global South in literature about the social role of Pentecostal churches, this chapter has turned the gaze towards their position in places *with* expanded welfare regimes, such as Flanders. Based on two case studies, it has proposed the concept of "parallel moral economies" as a way to characterize the relation between those religious and secular welfare grammars

that are constructed *alongside* rather than *in dialogue* with each other. In the churches under study, this dynamic resulted from their continuous reproduction of moral boundaries along secular and religious lines, which neither stemmed from nor generated postsecular rapprochement. Whereas in the first church, it manifested itself in the creation of its own structure of upward mobility free from secular influences, the second incorporated secular state interventions as divine miracles.

Such dynamics of "enclaving" have been considered typical of Pentecostal mega-churches in the global city (Coleman & Chattoo, 2020, p. 85). They somehow confirm the widely held picture of Born-Again Christianity as fundamentalist and self-contained. From a postsecular perspective, indeed, one might lament the missed chances for cooperation and crossovers between these churches' practices and those of other welfare actors and society at large. Some scholars, however, have contended that the Pentecostal mega-church's tendency toward enclaving is precisely where its value in European urban settings lies. In contexts differing significantly from the one they grew up in, the Pentecostal enclave may help immigrants "to keep body and soul together" (Burgess, 2020; Ojo, 2015).

Chapter 6: Translation or Semiotic Guerilla?

6.1. Intro

Drawing on a case study of a Pentecostal homeless shelter/church in Antwerp, this chapter will discern a third evangelical-secular pattern within the Flemish welfare context, which I refer to as "semiotic guerilla warfare". At first sight, I will argue, this pattern looks like postsecular rapprochement, with religious and secular actors trying to find common ground around the shared concern of poverty through practices of mutual translation (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013). Closer examination, however, reveals that no substantive rapprochement is taking place. Rather, the evangelical actor endows secular terminology with different, religious meaning in order to re-Christianize the welfare system from within. This mechanism, which obscures conflicting normativities by creating a false sense of consensus, resonates with Umberto Eco's concept of "semiotic guerrilla", in which elements of a hegemonic symbolic order are appropriated to undermine and challenge it (Eco, 1986).

The chapter will proceed as follows. First I will introduce the concept of semiotic guerilla warfare. Subsequently, I will present the successful church and FBO after which the Antwerp church/FBO under study is modelled, called "Divine Unity Fellowship". This neo-Pentecostal mega-church adopts an evangelical theology known as "dominion theology". Then, I will unpack the solidarity exercised by the Fellowship church and FBO in Antwerp and discuss its ambivalent relationship to formal welfare actors. Finally, I will illustrate the semiotic guerrilla pattern by means of discussing a particular situation of conflict. As such, it will become evident that this pattern prevents rather than enables the emergence of postsecular rapprochement.

6.2. Semiotic guerilla warfare

"Semiotic guerrilla warfare" was coined in 1973 by the Italian semiotic Umberto Eco. The concept was first used in an essay wherein he advocated for the use of semiotics as a means of resisting the hegemonic symbolic order imposed through unilateral communication channels (Eco, 1986; 2003, p. 19). Eco wrote in this respect: "We must occupy, in every place in the world, the first chair in front of every television set", underscoring the semantic power that lies in the gap between sender and receiver (Eco, 1986). This gap, he argued, was the arena for semiotic guerrilla warfare to unfold.

In concrete terms, semiotic guerrilla involves the manipulation of signs, symbols and communication to subvert established meanings and disrupt the cultural status quo. It is a "resistive tactic, employed

by subordinate groups in constructing counter-hegemonic meanings" (Odoardi, 2010, p. 36). Most notably, the concept was applied by Dick Hebdige in his work "Subculture: The Meaning of Style", where it was used to understand the punk act of reorganizing meaning "through 'perturbation and deformation'", including the incorporation of domestic items like pins and plastic clothes pegs into fashion (Hebdige, 2012, pp. 105-106). Likewise, I will argue, the case under study incorporates legitimate secular terminology, including "freedom", "love", "empowerment", and "business" rhetoric by re-articulating them with Christian imaginary. Before elaborating upon that argument, I will introduce the mother church the case under study is modelled after and its theology, respectively the "Divine Unity Fellowship" (hereafter "Fellowship") and "dominion theology".

6.3. The "Divine Unity Fellowship", Ukraine

Fellowship was founded in 1994 in Kiev, Ukraine, by Nigerian pastor and religious icon Elijah Akintola (pseudonym), who had moved to Eastern Europe to study. Much ink has been spilled over this Pentecostal mega-church and its founder ever since. Most notably, Fellowship is seen as the single most successful example of reverse mission with more than 80% of its membership consisting of native Ukrainians (Adogame, 2008; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005a, 2010). This, it is argued, is largely owing to a skillful combination of several factors. On the one hand, scholars point to the exceptional religious situation in former soviet countries, including Ukraine. All the while facing problematic degrees of loneliness, drug addiction and alcoholism, the collapse of the Iron Curtain left the country with a profound spiritual void (Karpov, 2013; Löfstedt, 2020). On the other, reference is made to pastor Akintola's hands-on approach in this regard, whose "pragmatism towards tackling these multifarious social, spiritual, economic problems, beyond the content of his message" has attracted more than 20.000 members (Adogame, 2008, p. 320). Most notably, in the wake of a collapsing state, Akintola has extensively engaged in charity. In 2006, thousands of people were fed daily in the Church's soup kitchen, around 3000 members overcame drug and alcohol addiction with the help of the church's drug habilitation centers, and countless street children were sheltered (Adogame, 2008). Through the largescale provision of welfare services, Fellowship inserted itself as a significant player in the Ukrainian civic sphere, notwithstanding serious opposition from public authorities and the Orthodox Church.

Underpinning these extensive welfare infrastructures, anthropologist Catherine Wanner observes, lies a spiritually rooted notion of illness and cure which is in accordance to the Born-Again idiom of radical regeneration (Wanner, 2019). On an individual level, Fellowship's core members and leaders have primarily consisted of former or recovering addicts and women in prostitution, some of whom

have moved to important functions in society after having made their way up in the church. On a collective level, the idea of national transformation, which turned out very appealing under postsocialist circumstances, has stood at the center of Fellowship's mission. In particular, the church's purpose has been "to be right there in every place where there could be potential decay", Akintola writes, with "decay" being understood less in a material than a spiritual sense (D27). The belief in this divine destination was strengthened as authorities and the public recognized the church's transforming impact on Ukraine, especially after working at the forefront of the 2004 Orange Revolution (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2006; Filiatreau, 2009).

Fellowship's theology has been categorized under "dominion theology", "Kingdom Now theology" or "seven mountain theology", a current in Christian Restorationism which seeks to "transform", "restore" and "redeem" modern secular culture in order to establish "dominion" on earth and reinstate Christ's Kingdom before His Second Coming (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2009, 2010). According to historian Virginia Garrard, "the movement is widespread, and its advocates are often politically influential, although it remains a minority current within the stream of evangelical Christianity writ large" (Garrard, 2020, p. 648). Historically fueled by opposition against secular liberalism (its contemporary origins trace back to 1973, the year abortion was legalized in the US), dominionism advocates social and political change in the here-and-now. It often does so based on a vision of society made up of seven mountains, namely religion, governance, education, family, media, arts, and economy (Heuser, 2021). Its core idea, which gained influence via American missionary Peter Wagner in the early 2000s, revolves around transforming each sphere by the power of Christ (Wagner, 1999, 2010). In a 2015 article called "transforming nations", for instance, Akintola writes: "I see a God that is absolutely interested in the day to day running of the world including governments. I see a God that would not allow himself to be isolated from his creation" (D28). Although this vision has raised suspicion among many Christians finding it unbiblical and endangering, the movement has stayed under the radar in non-Christian circles. Dominion theology, so Garrard states, remains hidden in plain sight.

After the 2022 Russian invasion, in which Akintola became an explicit Russian target, Fellowship Ukraine shut down and Akintola moved back to Nigeria. Over the years, however, its influence has reached far, with admirers and branches all over the world, including one in Antwerp.

6.4. House of transformation, Antwerp

It was 2008 as Afe, a Ghanaian migrant and mother of four children, established a Fellowship project in Antwerp. Having faced a challenging migration experience and a failed marriage, Akintola's YouTube programs had given her the strength to move on. Under the name "House of Transformation" (hereafter HoT), Afe founded both a homeless center and a church in Antwerp's periphery. Having distributed food on the streets before, she realized that the complex reality of homeless people demanded a holistic approach, one which would take into account not only its material, but also its emotional and spiritual dimensions: a form of empowerment. She undergirded this vision by and realized it using Christian principles. Like Akintola's Fellowship, she argued, her project was "all about transforming nations", "a social change" (D29). Its ultimate goal, so she preached at the Fellowship church where she has been the prophetess, was to restore the nation of Belgium in the name of Jesus following the seven mountains theology (D34). This, however, is not how the organization has presented itself to the outside world (i.e. in formal interviews, on their official Facebook page, towards formal welfare actors). In the following sections, I will show how HoT's solidarity was organized and analyze the ways in which it discursively staged its practices towards secular welfare actors. Rather than taking the shape of postsecular rapprochement, I will argue, this interaction can be considered a form of semiotic guerilla, in which elements of a hegemonic (secular) order are appropriated in order to bring it to disbalance.

HoT was established as a homeless center on the same moment as Afe founded the Antwerp Fellowship church. This mirrored Fellowship Kiev, which had always encouraged the creation of extensive networks of non-profit, non-governmental organizations as a means of gaining public legitimacy in environments not particularly open to religion (Filiatreau, 2009). Via this constellation, Fellowship Antwerp could easily draw membership from the pool of homeless involved in the HoT project, mostly people who had nowhere else to turn to. These people were either found on the streets or referred to HoT by other Pentecostal churches, local secular or catholic NGOs, homeless centers, or even (semi-)public secular welfare organizations including the CAW and OCMW. Unlike in other Antwerp African Initiated churches, and like Fellowship Ukraine, the membership in Fellowship Antwerp and HoT has stretched far beyond the Sub-Sahara African diaspora, comprising many "native" Belgian people.

It is by focusing on the most desperate cases that HoT has sought to differentiate itself from formal, secular welfare instances and other faith-based organizations and churches. To gain access was incredibly easy: no red tape, no discrimination in age, faith or legal situation, no judgement of one's past or appearance. "People must just come as they are, how they are and then receive the chance to

go through the process of transformation", Afe says (I32). In so doing, the organization presented itself as a bridge towards the regular welfare system. One time, Afe showed me a video she took the day before, saying: "This is how we fix a man, on the floor, bathing, you understand. This, the state cannot do. First aid, you know. The man is smelling, the man is abandoned, the man is… For him to be normal, even to be listened to is difficult. So, two years, the boss of CAW, he goes to the man every day, sit down with a mask, smelling, but he don't know what to do for him, because his job does not allow him to bath him or to clean him. He just have to talk to him" (I32).

HoT's relationship with formal welfare instances like the OCMW and CAW has always been paradoxical. On the one hand, the latter have referred people falling outside the scope of official welfare programs to HoT. The organization indeed did not give much weight to legal frameworks, professional standards, and administrative burdens but rather acted out of love of neighbor. On the other hand, precisely because of its disregard of these frameworks, HoT has never been entitled to any funding (I32; informal conversation with a City Employee). Rather, its building and daily operation have been financed with Afe's living wage, the allowances of her children (Afe is now the mother of 11 children), and with donations from the local and global Christian community she is connected with. In this respect, she says: "I would not give social continuously, cause I decided to use my living wage, my six hours, to do this, just to give back. I don't want the money for free" (I32). This ambivalence has created a sanctuary for the exercise of an evangelical type of charity that does not align with the secular moral and professional codes underpinning the established welfare regime, in particular the OCMW-law. Even more so, it has offered the church, as a practitioner of dominion theology, an entry for realizing the Kingdom of God in one of the seven mountains, namely the sphere of politics and the state, under which Afe categorizes public welfare institutions.

6.5. Postsecular rapprochement in HoT?

At first glance, HoT's here-and-now theology seemed to provide an avenue for the kind of faith-by-praxis that Cloke and Beaumont have identified as a fruitful catalyst for postsecular rapprochement (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013). Vanessa, Hanneke and Donald, three (Christian) people who make use of the services of HoT at the moment of my research, describe how Afe, as the central figure of the organization, embodies her Christian values and passes them on through her performance of care: "She often says things like 'I want to empower you' and 'blessed food', she mentions these things. But she does not wave her Bible at Muslims" (I34). In church services and videos, reference is often made to the parable of the Good Samaritan: "The Good Samaritan was not just moved. He took action. He took action. Amen. He cared for him. He didn't come to accuse him 'how did you fall' 'how did you

get yourself into this mess?"' (D29). Neither was the help of the Good Samaritan dependent on the faith of the man in need. Liam, an American migrant and Born-Again actively involved in the Fellowship church asserts that the same principle is applied in HoT: "The House is open to all people! I think today if a Jew knocks on the door, we would help too. Because in the end, whether Muslim or Jew, Jesus loves all people. Lise, Jesus loves everybody, there's no exception" (I36). As a result, HoT has become an eclectic coming together of socially excluded people across faith and other boundaries, all gathering around the praxis of care.

However, when taking a closer look, HoT's eclecticism has not truly generated a laboratory for the crossing-over of faith values and the experimental transformation of rigid mentalities. The issue in HoT has never been that it was selective in who it accepted, but rather that it expected something in return. The roots of these logics of deservingness lie in Afe's vision of empowerment and wholesale transformation, promoted on public platforms under the commonly accepted mantra: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for life" (D32). For Afe, empowerment is the essence of HoT: "Just push me into my transition and then as you have given me that push, I can move my life" (D29). In practice, this vision entails that welfare recipients are assigned responsibilities, and that, to develop themselves and gain self-esteem, they are expected to perform as givers too and use their talents to help build the HoT project. All people I have interviewed in HoT confirm that being part of HoT comes with responsibilities. Hanneke for instance says: "There is something in return: behaving respectfully and helping where you can, for instance taking care of the children, or Donald sometimes showers the men who cannot" (I34). Donald affirms: "Afe is strict, but really considers the person" (I33). "It's not the things you always want", Wesley says: "It's like a monastery", pointing to the fact that the use of TVs was long prohibited and that, often, there was no electricity (I38). Even Afe herself acknowledges: "I don't easily judge people, but I also demand responsibility from the people. They know it. I'm too strict. If I give you one cent, I demand you responsibility. I will tell you what you don't want to hear. I will tell you the truth of life" (I35).

The HoT type of empowerment has a strong Christian flavor and is strongly intertwined with the Born-Again idea of radical transformation which demands to leave the past behind and walk in the light of Jesus. It is a type of empowerment informed by love, yet a love that carries a strong disciplinary power. HoT's love "affects the subjects that relate under its diagrammatical spell" (Lancione, 2014, p. 3065). Although this in itself need not be problematic, the conversionist tendencies in HoT take such a form that they curtail the (non-)faithful sensibilities of its welfare subjects and violate their autonomy in doing so. As such, HoT's praxis of care can be categorized as the kind that, according to Cloke and

Beaumont, serves "to reinforce boundaries of difference between Christian faith and others, leading to the establishment of relations across those boundaries which invoke a guardianship of 'truth' on the inside, and potential conversion to the 'truth' on the outside" (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, p. 41). Donald, a homeless person who is sheltered in HoT, gives a good example: "When we arrived in this house, we first had to do a prayer, the sinner's prayer, in which you acknowledge that you accept Jesus" (I33). Later, Hanneke tells me the following: "We shouldn't stay here and make sweet nothings either! At some point they do say, 'Hola, where is your Jesus'? A while ago, a senior pastor visited here who said I was letting my faith linger, and he was right. So now I pay more attention to it" (I34).

In some cases, the empowerment approach works. Wesley, a former drug addict with a pile of debts and two failed marriages, is considered "the first fruit of the project" (Afe in D29). Having been sent from pillar to post in established welfare services, he eventually stumbled into HoT (Wesley I38, also I39, a social worker of a local organization). After 10 years of ups and downs in HoT, he ended up going back to work and living on his own. This, he says, is owing to the peace of mind he gained from being included in the HoT family, something he contrasts with how he was treated in psychiatry where "people are just pushed thinking 'you are nothing' 'you mean nothing'" (I38). To this day, Wesley attends Fellowship church services and hangs around the house with the children every day.

Such a configuration of care/control, however, can work both in an empowering and constraining way (see Williams, 2016). Wesley, in this respect, does admit that some people do not like the kind of personal attention they receive in HoT. A social worker active in a local organization that used to refer people to HoT provides the example of Lydia. Lydia and her children were requested to leave the country, but never did so. Instead, they ended up in HoT where they received food and shelter. Things got bad, however, between Lydia and Afe. Lydia, a Muslim woman, claimed she was woken up at 4.30am to pray. In addition, she was forced to volunteer at the HoT second-hand shop. Fierce arguments ensued and Lydia wanted to leave but had no alternative. "Getting them out was harder than getting them in", the social worker says. In his view, HoT presented people with a false choice: "Homeless and free, or with an address and food, but unfree" (I39).

After some scandals (in particular, a story about a child who fell seriously ill due to hygiene problems in the house, and the case of the Empowerment Hub which I am about to discuss), established secular organizations and NGOs ceased referring people to HoT. This took a long time for several reasons, however. Most notably, I suggest, Afe has concealed from the eye of the public that her caregiving was dependent on evangelically inspired demands. As I will now demonstrate through the conflict of

the Empowerment Hub, she partly did so by publicly employing a secular lexicon. Rather than as an example of Habermasian translation, I will argue, this should be understood as a semiotic guerrilla, in which secular terminology is appropriated and endowed with new religious meaning.

The following discussion of the case of the Empowerment Hub aims to elucidate the interplay and mismatch between Christian and secular welfare grammars that have underpinned the unofficialized partnership between HoT and established welfare actors over the years. It draws on interviews with City Staff, Afe and members of HoT, the official Facebook page of HoT, Fellowship church services, and YouTube videos directed to the global Christian community.

6.6. The case of the Empowerment Hub

In December 2012, Afe founded a new non-profit organization, called Empowerment Hub vzw. After the bankruptcy of HoT, its purpose as an event center in Antwerp's periphery was to generate income for financing HoT's rooms and food. In 2018, the center accommodated a social restaurant, a second-hand shop, an event hall, the church's worship space, and, on the second floor, HoT's homeless shelter. The staff consisted of the homeless people themselves (fluctuating from 5 to 15 people). As described in the formal statute of its foundation, this was framed as a means of offering work experience to the socially vulnerable, which, the statute states, should be achieved through service vouchers and article 60 of the OCMW law (D33). This article allows for the conclusion of employment contracts between the OCMW and social organizations in order to (re)open the beneficiary's right to unemployment benefits and help the person develop experience on the labour market. Simultaneously, the concept of the Empowerment Hub fitted well with HoT's philosophy of participation and wholesale transformation.

After one year, however, the organization and all homeless were evicted from the building due to a set of legal problems in which the organization got caught up. First, one of the homeless had filed a complaint a few months earlier about the fact that she was forced to volunteer in exchange for a room. The social inspection investigated the case, followed by fines and lawsuits amounting to 10.000 euros. Second, HoT took the building in sublease from a shop: the owner did not officially recognize its presence. Third, the building had a commercial purpose and was not suitable to put people to sleep.

How come that established welfare organizations and institutions referred people to an organization that did not live up to professional service standards and respect fundamental human rights? Looking from a postsecular perspective, an important explanation lies in HoT's discursive strategy, which I will

refer to as a dynamic of semiotic guerilla warfare. Most notably, the organization switched discourse when entering the public arena, using a discourse that was more readily perceived as legitimate by those who referred people in need but obscured underlying conflicting normativities.

A first example can be found in the discrepancy between how the Empowerment Hub and HoT portrayed themselves on public forums on the one hand and towards their evangelical community on the other hand. On a public flyer for the official opening of the Empowerment Hub in December 2017, the Hub is described as a place for "life and business coaching for those who are ready for a new start" (D34). HoT is depicted as "a meeting place where one can talk with fellow sufferers and experts by experience over a free cup of coffee or tea" (D32). A little earlier, the following mission statement was posted on the official Facebook page (emphasis added): "We provide vital help so that people can rebuild their lives and are supported out of homelessness for good. We offer one-on-one support, advice and courses for homeless people. How we help someone depends on their individual needs and circumstances. It could be with finding a home and settling in, getting new skills and finding a job, or help with their health and wellbeing. We use research to find out how best to improve our services, but also to find wider solutions to homelessness. Together with homeless people and Crisis supporters, we campaign for the changes needed to end homelessness for good" (D32). This public discourse draws on a generally accepted repertoire of social support and empowerment. Although it occasionally makes reference to its Christian faith motivation, it does so in vague and widely accepted terms, using words like "love", "blessed" and "praying for…".

By contrast, on YouTube channels called "Christ TV" and "Kingdom Family TV", Afe describes the Hub as "a job creating arena for HoT" (D29). HoT, then, is presented as "a Good Samaritan project to cure the ills of society" (D31), "a church without walls" (D29, D31), and "a center point where the Kingdom of God is being enhanced" (D30). In these videos, Afe is more outspoken about the "research" underpinning the HoT operation. She refers to Akintola's seven mountain's theory and his book "church shift", which advocates a revolution for the church. "There is absolutely no use in having a big church without changing culture, speaking to society and curing social ills", is the basic claim of Akintola by which Afe was influenced (Adelaja, 2008). She says: "Those that know HoT, you can testify that I operate through the Kingdom and that I understand Kingdom principles" (D30). "It's all about transforming nations (D29)". Indeed, in the video, a different kind of mission statement is voiced:

"We are Kings and we are called to rule and I do believe that everybody has something to give to society. The church will be called effective if the church will come out to play a part in society. There are seven mountains or cultures in society. You have economics, you have politics, you have religion, you have family, you have arts and entertainment and so on and so on. And I believe, every church, every denomination is called for a specific part of it. So whatever that I have, whatever the church has, we gonna all share, come together just for one soul to be saved. Individual blocks building up a kingdom to perfect one soul" (D29).

This difference in discourse should not be mistaken for a form of Habermasian translation or code-switching, in which religious imaginary is converted into a language that is accessible to all in order to increase opportunities to find an overlapping consensus with other faith parties (see Chapman & Hamalainen, 2011; McNamee, 2011). In HoT, more so than necessary, things seemed to get lost in translation. First, in public, Afe has remained utterly silent about HoT's ultimate goal, which was to re-Christianize secular structures from within. Second, HoT's public discourse was marked by a dynamic that has been considered typical of Dominionism worldwide: the hijacking of secular terminology by filling it with evangelical meaning (Garrard, 2020; Hedges, 2008). In Hot's discourse, this dynamic has taken place in at least four (clusters of) words, namely "freedom", "love", "empowerment" and "business".

First, both publicly and behind the scenes, Afe has referred to the Empowerment Hub as a "free" place. It is clear, however, that HoT could not be considered free in the sense of being able to make autonomous choices – as is the condition of established welfare institutions. Rather, freedom should be understood here as "liberated" from mundanity and in full obedience of Christ, as it is used by many evangelicals and dominionists (Garrard, 2020). Strongly intertwined is HoT's concept of "love", which was publicly used as a means to articulate HoT with legitimate concepts like "family", "home" and "care". Internally, however, "love" indicated deliverance and submission to God and to the one who speaks in His Name, namely Afe. As mentioned before, love in HoT functioned as a disciplinary force to keep the homeless in line, and as a device in their process of empowerment. The word "empowerment", then, ties in well with the participatory turn in social work and social policy, and with the general call for structural solutions for poverty in contrast to the arbitrariness and paternalistic attitudes associated with charity. In HoT, however, the concept was charged with the Born-Again connotation of radical transformation in the body of Christ, both individually and nationally: "It is the church to rise up to educate the people, equip the people, empower the people, to go and stand on this mountain and be a city that is set on a hill that can never be hidden", Afe says to her evangelical

community (D29). Finally, despite officially being a non-profit organization, HoT and the Empowerment Hub were eager to make use of business language, referring to themselves as "offices" (D34) and as a "hallelujah-business" (D35), and pointing to Afe as the "CEO" (D35). Rather than as business language in the everyday sense, this should be read from the lens of the seven mountains theory which frames realizing the Kingdom as a business, one where profit is thought of not only in terms of money but also of souls. Likewise, as mentioned earlier, HoT's practice of founding nonprofit organizations independent from the church should be understood as a means of gaining legitimacy in a secularized context with a traditionally strong civil society. Internally, however, these organizations are very much considered extensions of the church: "The foundation of HoT is worship" (D31).

6.7. The Empowerment Hub and Semiotic Guerilla

By omitting key information and semantically rearranging words in public, HoT has shifted its message according to audience and masked its true religious purpose. This dynamic prevented HoT from finding actual common ground with other faith actors and established, secular welfare organizations, since any sense of communality remained based on false assumptions. A city employee in this respect confirms having experienced confusion in his interaction with Afe over the years, struggling to decide which filter to apply on her discourse.

Scholars have used the term "logocide" to refer to this dominionist strategy of appropriating and re-signifying common words in order to restore Christian values in secularized societies (Garrard, 2020; Hedges, 2008). Logocide in dominionism, they observe, has mainly taken place among "key words of the United States' political idiom that have long been linked to secular, liberal democracy, such as 'freedom', 'liberty', 'wisdom', 'life' and 'love'" (Garrard, 2020, p. 648). The term logocide, however, lacks broad support in academic discussions. Moreover, it carries a quite aggressive overtone, while in fact, Garrard writes, the mechanism works in a subtle way as even insiders might fail to note differences in meaning. In HoT, moreover, logocide does not remain restricted to words. It implies the adoption of legitimate forms more generally, including for instance the form of a nonprofit organization.

As an alternative, I propose Eco's concept of semiotic guerilla, referring to a mechanism in which elements of a hegemonic symbolic order are appropriated in order to undermine and challenge it. In Hot, I suggest, this dynamic has masked underlying oppositional stances that would otherwise obstruct any cooperative relation with secular, established welfare organizations. It allowed the FBO, moreover, to gain access to the "political sphere" it eventually aimed to re-christianize from within.

The common words associated with legitimate secular discourse, in other words, became semiotic weapons in HoT's attempt to transform each of the seven mountains by the power of Christ.

To speak of "warfare" might sound melodramatic, Hebdige writes (Hebdige, 2012, p. 105). In the case of HoT, however, this theatrical term is not so farfetched. It resonates with the spiritual warfare discourse it spreads in church service and online towards its evangelical community. This discourse included statements like "we must *fight* for the salvation of Antwerp" (D36), or "Kingdom citizens that cry for unity among churches in Belgium, *arise and act on unity* by supporting every kingdom agenda" (D36) (emphases added). The term "guerilla", then, underscores the lack of open and mutual engagement between the different welfare grammars and their normative underpinnings. My main reason for adopting the concept, however, lies in its assumption that actions and discourses are underpinned by struggles and relations of power. Arguably, this possibility is not given sufficient consideration in consensus-oriented paradigms like the Habermasian and in concepts like postsecular rapprochement.

6.8. *Uncovering the guerrilla act: opening up a liminal space?*

The closure of the Empowerment Hub has to some extent uncovered this semiotic guerrilla act, leaving both parties in a state of vulnerability. HoT, on the one hand, lost its building and public credibility. Established, secular welfare organizations, on the other, were confronted with the realization of their insufficient monitoring when it came to referring welfare clients. This fragile situation offered an opportunity for both to engage in a process of reflexive dialogue and mutual learning, repositioning their ethical and political sensibilities around the in-commonness of their purpose, namely aiding the homeless. In practice, however, the event reinforced rather than blurred faith boundaries, as oppositions were laid bare and discursively reinforced. The videos that appeared on Christ TV shortly after the closure of the Hub reveal glimpses of the conflicting welfare grammars underpinning HoT's and the public instances' activities. They show, moreover, how Afe has capitalized on the situation to advance her discursive struggle, namely to internally solidify her Christian worldview and reaffirm the need of a politicized faith which cures the ills of Belgium, a place where "the Kingdom of God is suffering" (D36).

In one such video, Afe calls Christians worldwide for help with money, prayer or goods sent by post. The following sentences illustrate how she did so by drawing on Christian principles and turning against the secular principles underlying the law: "We had a vision, we had a mission, but then the authorities of the land, they came and they inspected the building", Afe declares. "On November the

13th, they came to throw everything outside the building, throw it in the dust bin and they moved the people out and they moved us out" (D31). She continues: "So when we went to the court, unbelievingly, the judge didn't even ask nothing, nothing, the judge just said 'it's not possible', we are at fault and they have to throw us out, you understand, so we tried to negotiate with them to say that Christmas is a very sensitive season. And we would beg them if they would just give us the grace to go through this transition and they said no, they said no. We had to leave immediately. (…) So we saw wickedness at work". And finally: "This is purely racism and discrimination to the body of Christ." (D30). Later Afe confesses in the video that, emanating from her Christian faith motivation, she has consciously ignored the myriad of rules: "In the eight years of the existence of HoT, we see the challenges of not being accepted in the land. Meanwhile we are doing the work, but because we came with another mindset, you know, of the deeds of Jesus Christ, we were still persevered to do this work anyway. So we've been closing our eyes in things" (D30).

The City, for its part, has not sufficiently succeeded in its task to detect gaps and find overlaps in the welfare mix. The need for housing assistance in Antwerp has been twice as high compared to the existing offer (Mathys, 2021). This lack of structural housing policy has opened up a space for welfare providers that operate on ethically incompatible terms to fill those gaps, and thus for the mechanism of semiotic guerilla warfare to occur.

Afe, in turn, has eagerly seized upon this vulnerability in order to internally validate the relevance of her work and by extension her Evangelical Christianity. After the closure, the rumor of the Empowerment Hub scandal swept over Antwerp and reached all established civil society and public welfare organizations with the message to cease referring people to HoT and stop cooperating in any way. At that time, the organization and nine homeless people were left on the streets. In the video, Afe criticizes established welfare instances in this respect: "Nobody came to us, nobody called us. And who are our public actually? Our public are the people that the OCMW sent, the people that the CAW sent, and these are all public institutions" (D31). "So CAW sent mothers and children, fathers and children on the street to HoT. Meanwhile they don't want to open their faces to say 'okay', they don't want to come out and say 'we've sent the people'" (D30). Afe ends her argument with the following words, once again using the situation to create opposition and reinforce her belief system:

> "We are going to pray because the city would accept us, the city would begin to bless us, because we are here to bless. We thank God we went through this shameful situation and it is a wake-up call to us, the mothers of Zion, to rise up to pray. It is a wake-up call for intercessors

to rise up and pray, it is a wake-up call for all wounded intercessors to now take it very personal and rise up and fight until we see salvation in this land" (D29).

6.9. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a pattern of evangelical-secular interaction which I have called "semiotic guerilla warfare". In this pattern, an evangelical actor publicly adopts legitimate secular discourse while internally endowing it with Christian meaning in order to rechristianize secular welfare structures from within. Rather than as a form of Habermasian translation intent on finding common ground via generally accessible language, this dynamic produces a false consensus by obscuring underlying conflicting normativities. It can therefore easily be considered a form of "dark postsecularity", with secular and religious sensibilities entwining in ways that neither stem from nor spark receptive generosity and substantive postsecular rapprochement (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 25). Discerning the semiotic guerrilla pattern in this respect further encourages us to question the consensus-oriented framework underlying the notions of translation and postsecular rapprochement. Studying processes of postsecular rapprochement, one can argue, makes sense only to the extent that it embraces the inevitable effects of conflict and power.

The occurrence of semiotic guerilla has been facilitated by the failure of the local welfare mix to meet the needs of citizens. Although ethical mismatches and coordination problems form an inherent challenge in disorganized welfare mixes, structural gaps risk to be filled by anyone and become normative battlefields for faith- and ethical boundaries to be contested. This is especially the case in liminal policy domains like housing and homelessness where decisions about in- and exclusion are made (Blommaert et al., 2005; De Corte & Roose, 2020). This chapter, therefore, may serve as a reminder for policy makers and social workers, as well as scholars of welfare and religion to truly engage with the faith of the welfare actors they work with, and remember that the postsecular city does not solely produce modes of postsecular rapprochement, but just as well the opposite.

Chapter 7: Pragmatic Rapprochement

7.1. Intro

This chapter provides an example of a religious-secular pattern that has been called "pragmatic rapprochement" in literature on postsecularity in welfare contexts (Cloke, 2015; Cloke et al., 2019; Cloke & Beaumont, 2013). This pattern involves religious and secular faith actors working together to address shared problems without engendering ethical crossovers or reflexive transformations of their philosophical viewpoints. In literature, such dynamic is viewed as an initial phase in the process of *postsecular* rapprochement. This chapter nuances this linear image and argues that pragmatic rapprochement should be considered a religious-secular pattern in its own right. Drawing on a case study of an evangelical-inspired food distribution in Antwerp which engages in pragmatic rapprochement with secular, established welfare actors over the referral of people in need, it uncovers the following paradox: the same factors that facilitate pragmatic rapprochement may be the ones to hinder its development toward postsecular rapprochement. This paradox, moreover, will underscore once again that postsecularity is always conditioned by and entangled within relations of power, especially in the context of public-private partnerships.

The chapter commences with a brief discussion of the concept of pragmatic rapprochement. Then, it will situate the case under study and unpack the way in which its solidarity is organized around moral boundaries between evangelical givers and non-evangelical receivers. Subsequently, it will discuss how these same moral boundaries influence the case's relations with established, secular actors. Despite attempts from the part of the latter for more substantial cooperation, I will demonstrate, these relations remain limited to the pragmatic referral of people in need. This dynamic, I conclude, tends to create ethical deadlock rather than postsecular rapprochement. Financial difficulties, however, may come to exert pressure on this delicate pragmatic equilibrium and force a postsecular repositioning of ethical values.

7.2. Pragmatic rapprochement

Pragmatic rapprochement relates to religious and secular parties collaborating on a shared issue while approaching each other's faith motivation as a mere practical instrument for common action. In the words of Paul Cloke and colleagues, it is "a tactic chosen in order to get something done and is minimally concerned in its initial stages with the emergence of novel affective topologies" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 146). It is seen, however, as a first step towards postsecular rapprochement. Cloke and Beaumont write in this respect: "such pragmatics demonstrate a willingness for rapprochement that

creates conditions for postsecular possibility, and these conditions in turn open up new spaces of opportunity for faith-groups to emphasize praxis rather than dogma, and to break out of their previous position of being 'hushed up' in the public sphere" (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, p. 41). Pragmatic rapprochement, they write later, "can mean that, over time, less stuff has to be 'left at the door' for the same group of people to work together and new, more developed crossover narratives can emerge" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 146) .

The case I am about to discuss forms an example of pragmatic rapprochement between an evangelical food distribution and secular, established welfare actors in the city of Antwerp. In order to clarify the dynamics of this relationship, I will first situate the food distribution in space and time and discuss how its solidarity is organized around a moral distinction between (evangelical) givers and (non-evangelical) receivers.

7.3. Situating the case

Harvest of Hope was founded by Ronald, an evangelical who encountered poverty on a daily basis in his job, which involved cutting off electricity of families facing financial difficulties. As the number of these families seeking assistance with him privately grew, Ronald and his wife decided to establish a non-profit organization in 1994, naming it "Harvest of Hope" (hereafter "Harvest"). The beginning years did not run smoothly, however. Whereas the organization was granted free use of a warehouse owned by the electric company where Ronald worked, it fell short of resources to provide food for 150 families. Ronald in this respect recalls: "There was two or three liters of milk in there, a few things of sugar, flour and that was all" (I40). Following multiple prayers, Ronald eventually received a phone call from a rice company that offered its rice leftovers. Subsequently, a few more companies and supermarkets called until the problem was totally solved. Ronald in this respect emphasizes: "Then you see how God works, not how we work or how we do things, but how God works" (I40).

Over a period of 20 years, Harvest has grown to include seven local chapters across different cities in Flanders. In Antwerp, it has become one of the largest among circa 20 food distributions (in addition, there are about 5 social groceries and neighborhood resto's). Situated in a dense neighborhood with a long migration history and a high proportion of residents with a low socio-economic profile, Harvest has surrounded itself with a plethora of service providers, including a community health center, a homeless shelter and many humanitarian organizations directed towards refugees, people with addictions or financial problems, some of which faith-based (Meeus & Schillebeeckx, 2015). This did not engender postsecular rapprochements across lines of religious and secular difference, however.

The next section will discuss the way in which Harvest's solidarity is organized around a moral distinction between (evangelical) givers and (non-evangelical) receivers. This moral distinction, I will argue, has prevented the development of postsecular rapprochements, both among the givers and receivers within the organization, and between the organization and secular, formal welfare actors. Paradoxically, the distinction has been upheld and legitimized through pragmatic partnerships with the OCMW, the CAW and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).

7.4. Solidarity in Harvest

My first experience in Harvest took place in February 2021. In between the busy moving of palettes and the preparations of food packages, I interviewed Ronald. Delighted to talk to me about his work, he welcomed me with a gift. It was a key ring with a QR-code, leading me to a digitalized version of the Bible. Occasionally, he said, he would gift this to customers, and a whole bunch of paper Bibles was waiting in the warehouse for new owners as well. Most of the time, he told me, it was Muslims who came to ask for Bibles. This being the first topic of our conversation, it quickly became clear to me how integral evangelical faith was to the organization. Simultaneously, another thing struck me. As I looked around and Ronald continued to talk, I saw how efficiently Harvest was organized. Amongst others, the food distribution was held at specific hours and according to a rotation system. A well elaborated system was installed for stocking the food in the warehouse. A clear division of labor was established for the volunteers to make the packages, and so on.

Harvest's work hinges on several resources. First, it is financially supported by many evangelical churches in the Antwerp region, although the majority does not donate structurally. Such gifts cover the rent of warehouses, assurances, and the clothing that Harvest occasionally distributes. Most of Harvest's volunteers, moreover, are members of these evangelical churches, a large part of which can be classified under the post-war Dutch-speaking evangelical churches. Ronald himself, for instance, belongs to a church affiliated to the VEG (Vrije Evangelische Gemeenten). Second, Harvest relies on individual gifts, which is stimulated by the fact that they are tax deductible. Third, one of the warehouses used by Harvest is rented for free by the Catholic school neighboring the organization. Fourth, Ronald has put a lot of his own money into the organization. Finally, Harvest is recognized by the Federal public planning service for social integration (POD MI) to receive help from FEAD. This means that Harvest receives some food products from the European Union via the provincial foodbank, directed towards people who live below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (Hermans et al., 2023). In order to obtain this European help, Harvest needs to be able to prove that its receivers indeed find themselves among "the most deprived persons", as defined in the EU regulation nr

223/2014 art. 2.2.3 Therefore, Harvest's receivers comprise people who were referred by the OCMW or have been subject to an independent examination concerning their income and family composition. In Harvest, this precondition intertwines with and sustains moral boundaries between givers and receivers that are to some extent evangelically informed. These moral boundaries, I will argue, inhibit the emergence of postsecular dynamics. In order to offer insight into this intricate dynamic, I will now discuss the relations between Harvest's givers and receivers.

7.4.1. Givers and receivers

Almost all of Harvest's givers are evangelicals. This, Ronald says, is an unwritten requirement: "I have bad experience with other things so it has to be evangelical. (…) You have the same ideas, the same thoughts. If you work with others who are going to try to impose their thoughts... for instance, Catholics, they hang all sorts of things on the wall here" (I40). Johan, a volunteer, acknowledges that he faced challenges when a Muslim woman volunteered in Harvest wearing a headscarf. For him, as for other volunteers, the motivation to commit to Harvest is intrinsically linked to his evangelical faith. He says: "If the fruit of the holy spirit, if it dwells in you then you have a lot of things in your life like love, faithfulness, self-control, patience. There are nine such things, and you carry those like a cloak with you and when people see that cloak, then it's fantastic, that reflects on them" (I41). Naomi in turn refers to the good Samaritan when asked about her motivation (I42), and Ronald admits that the true motive behind his actions is spreading the gospel, especially to the poor, as prescribed by the Bible. "But we don't tell it", he says. "I'm not trying to convince anyone. Why? It's not possible. You can't. I can't help you. I can say 'read that' or 'read that' and then, when I've said that then I go into prayer and I ask God for mercy. Yes, that's the difference" (I40). Although the official logo of Harvest carries a cross, the faith motivation is not explicitly stated on the website either (D37). Still, it is contended that, as a volunteer "you pray for every package you bring, that it may yield, not only physically but also spiritually" (I41).

By contrast, almost none of Harvest's receivers are evangelicals. In the big crowd of people waiting for food packages, a lot of women wear headscarves. Most of the "customers" indeed are Muslim. A few of them are Jewish. But all of them have passed the poverty test, with their membership cards serving as evidence. During my second visit in Harvest, Ronald explained this membership card system to me. There are plasticized and cardboard membership cards, he clarified. The latter are designated for the "covid cases", the people who began facing financial difficulties during the

[3] "Most deprived persons" means "natural persons - individuals, families, households, or groups composed of such persons - whose need for aid has been determined on the basis of objective criteria established by the competent national authorities in consultation with the relevant parties, while avoiding conflicts of interest, or defined by the partner organizations and approved by those competent national authorities, and may include elements that allow aid to be targeted to the most deprived persons in certain geographical areas." https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/NL/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32014R0223

lockdown period. The former are meant for the regular customers, awarded to those who have been attending long enough to get one. The card includes a number (e.g., C99), the Harvest logo, the individual's name, and occasionally a photo. Meticulous records are kept of who came when. The recipients are divided into three groups. Each comes every three weeks. Those of the regulars who have missed the distribution once are no longer included in the system. I ask whether people without papers come to Harvest too, considering that they cannot be referred by the OCMW or CAW. Ronald answers: "Yes, that happens via via. But they have to be able to prove their family composition. Then they usually drop out." "How do they prove it? Do they bring their children?", I ask. "No, through their pass from their country of origin". Ronald continues: "There are also those who are in the asylum center. They shouldn't come either: They get food there, but they just come because they like it better here" (I40).

The food distribution is organized in such a way that it installs a hierarchical relation between givers and receivers which is to some extent evangelically informed. Givers, on the one hand, tend to instrumentalize recipients in two ways: first as convertible subjects and second as the needy they are supposed to offer help to according to the Bible. Receivers, on the other hand, are expected to perform suffering and gratitude, even while sent by the OCMW on the basis of their rights. I will argue that this asymmetrical dynamic prevents ethical and faith crossovers to occur within the event-space of the food distribution, however religiously diverse. The next sections illustrate how this dynamic is maintained via spatial conduct, language use, and expectations of gratitude and suffering.

7.4.2. Three techniques of drawing moral boundaries between givers and receivers

First of all, moral boundaries are reflected in and sustained through Harvest's spatiality (see Knott, 2015). Tables and a courtyard strictly separate the givers and receivers. As the crowd of customers await their turn at the beginning of the courtyard next to the street, the volunteers prepare the packages in the warehouse at the end of the courtyard. In between is an empty space that is only crossed when a recipient comes to collect the package after his/her/their name was called, or when someone wants to negotiate something with Ronald. For some people, a receiver tells me, this crossing feels like a walk of shame. Covid, in this respect, has been a deal breaker. Before the restrictions, Harvest used to provide a space for receivers to have a coffee while waiting, creating more possibilities for liminal moments of encounter through which "existing ethical and political attitudes, beliefs and identities can be reinforced, reworked or challenged" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 115).

Another performative element in Harvest's spatiality consists of the posters hanging around in the warehouse, carrying evangelical proverbs including the following:

> "The Fool is the one who thinks 'there is no God'"
> "Son of God, Prince of peace, King of Israel, Jesus CHRIST for the son of man has come to seek and to save that was lost."
> "GOD speaks: incline your ear and come to Me; hear, and your soul shall live"
> "GOD speaks: call upon me in the day of distress"
> "Repent and believe, for the end is at hand"
> "ONLY JESUS CHRIST SAVES all who believe in Him"

Most of these posters become visible for receivers the moment they come pick up their package. Although spreading them in itself is a legitimate act which aligns with the freedom of religion, speech, and organization, one can question whether they create space for recognizing the radical alterity of those receivers who do not associate with Christianity.

Secondly, moral boundaries are produced through language. This becomes evident, amongst others, in how the volunteers talk *about* the recipients, often in their presence. The first time I helped with distributing the food packages, for instance, a woman asked me for a halal portion even though someone else had already given her one. "Beware, *they* are testing you because you are a new face" shouted Ada as a group of receivers stood beside her. Another time, I was heading to grab a coffee during the distribution when a volunteer said: "Take your time, *they* can wait", again in the presence of recipients. Another illustration pertains to diapers. Many people, especially women, request diapers since they are expensive. But while I am talking to someone asking for one, Ronald and Ada warn me to be careful who I give them to: "If it only says two on *their* membership card, then they don't have children."

It occurs to me, moreover, that the givers create a distance from receivers by talking about "those" people or "that" man, instead of for instance "the" people or "the" man. A snippet from Johan's interview illustrates this: "Yes, *those* people all have to go to the OCMW first and they find out if they are entitled to it. Because euh, otherwise everyone comes down here with a Mercedes" (I41). Another example relates to how Ada talks about receivers during the assemblage of the packages. The process of making and offering a food package proceeds as follows. The volunteer grabs the membership card of the receiver. According to the family composition on the card, the volunteer puts parcels on a cart

and supplements them with bread, cookies and milk. The volunteer calls the name on the membership card and asks whether the person is Muslim. Yes? The volunteer supplements the package with halal products. No? The volunteer supplements the package with meat products. At a certain point, Ada and I had established a system in which I collected the membership cards and distributed the packages while she assembled them. In order to know whether she should put halal or not, she always asked me for the name on the membership card: "Jantje, Pietje or Mohammed?" she would ask, with the person in question clearly able to hear it. Once, I stood next to Ada in front of a man accepting his package. Before I could ask whether he ate halal, she said loudly: "You can see, *that*'s a Muslim". Another time, a man and a woman left half their package behind. I needed to tell them this was not allowed. "We spend so long on a package and even then, it's not good," a Brazilian volunteer tells Ada: "That means you're not really in need". Ada to me: "It costs 25 euros, such a package! You have to add it all up! Halal, we still do that, or omit bread if they make their own, but other than that, no. They should give it to someone else who can use it, or they shouldn't come here".

My point here is not that this linguistic barrier-drawing is informed by evangelical faith per se. Such dynamics are prevalent in many food distribution initiatives, religious or not (see for instance Ghys & Oosterlynck, 2015). Rather, it is that this produces boundaries which obstruct the emergence of spontaneous conversations between evangelical givers and non-evangelical receivers through which faith crossovers could occur.

Thirdly, the asymmetry can be witnessed through the emotional exchange receiving a package entails (see Lancione, 2014, p. 3065). Implicitly, Harvest's volunteering culture is underpinned by the belief that the needier the recipients are, the easier it is for volunteers to accomplish their Biblical demand of helping the less fortunate. Under this tendency, it seems, lies the sort of disposition or technique of self that sociologist Anne Allahyari has called "moral selving", that is, the work of "creating oneself as a more virtuous, and often spiritual person" through practices of charity (Allahyari, 2000, p. 4). Even having passed a process of evaluation and eventual acceptance, receivers in Harvest are implicitly expected to prove themselves as needy. They are "loved" when displaying passivity and humility, and performing gratitude and suffering. This is something Naomi, a volunteer, says quite literally: "We have already had people crying when we come to deliver a parcel. Of gratitude. Yeah, then you know it for sure of course" (I42). This dynamic strongly became apparent, for instance, when Ronald had scarves to distribute, but far fewer than the number of people waiting in line for food. Ronald therefore randomly threw the scarves into the crowd, after which people started to beg, and some

were on the verge of a fight. Women, for that matter, often bring their young children, who sometimes receive something extra such as a Playmobil toy.

The pressure for recipients to prove their deservingness has shown itself clearly, moreover, in how newly arrived Ukrainian people were treated differently, namely as intrinsically deserving. In the spring of 2022, the number of recipients burgeoned because of the war in Ukraine, and the courtyard was completely packed. Unlike other recipients, Ukrainians were not required to be referred by the OCMW, and most of them arrived in Harvest via word of mouth. These people, however, did receive an extra package of basic products. Legally, this was in line with the exception that FEAD made for Ukrainian refugees.[4] Morally, this priority measure seemed undergirded by compassion and an urge of volunteers to position themselves as virtuous evangelicals. This became evident in the prayer circle that took place before food distribution, in which volunteers pray to God for strength during the distribution. One of the first days on which Ukrainian people were pouring in, a prayer said: "We are not doing this because we are fantastic, but because You are fantastic, God". But still it continued: "Thank you God, for letting *us* be the ones to help these people in need" (emphasis added).

One last example lays bare how the uneven relationships between givers and receivers are entangled with evangelical faith. At the moment of my research, three people were acting both as giver and as receiver. These people were exempted from waiting the line and received their package in advance. Meeting them in their role as givers, I could sense the role conflict and shame they felt with this situation. Even though I had talked with them extensively before, I only found out about their double role after four days of field work. The discomfort accompanying this double role combination, however, was mitigated by the faith disposition of these three people. In contrast to other receivers, all of them were devoted members of an evangelical church.

In sum, the relationships between (evangelical) givers and (non-evangelical) receivers is marked by asymmetry. This asymmetry prevents ethical crossovers to occur within the space of the food distribution. As I will argue now, this also affects the public-private partnerships between Harvest and the OCMW and stands in the way of their pragmatic rapprochement becoming a postsecular one.

7.5. Relationships with formal actors

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/news/ukraine-final-adoption-care

The role of food banks and local food distributing initiatives is contested. Recently, their expansion and professionalization has sparked debates in Flanders about whether they form vehicles to realize structural welfare policy or rather signal its failure (e.g. Depauw & Driessens, 2012; Ghys & Oosterlynck, 2015). Most notably, concerns have been raised about OCMWs increasingly "intrumentalizing" food distributions, thereby forsaking their own obligation to realize the fundamental rights of every citizen (Cantillon, 2020, p. 18; Hermans, Cantillon, & Marchal, 2024, p. 11). Essentially, one can argue, this tension field comes down to the distinction between a "needs" and "rights" perspective. Whereas an approach based on the former is grounded in personal relationships between givers and receivers ("charity"), the latter "promise people support and access to resources needed for a decent life, regardless of their personal relationships with other people and how they are valued as individuals. They hold much more the promise of equality, and that promise is - at least in theory - guaranteed by government and its bureaucratic rules" (Oosterlynck, 2020, p. 34). It is this tension around which the pragmatic relationship between OCMW Antwerp and Harvest revolves. While the OCMW appeals to Harvest in order to fulfill its task of realizing social *rights*, Harvest makes use of the OCMW in order to select its customers on the basis of their *needs*. These differing welfare approaches, however, simultaneously hinder *ethical* crossovers from occurring in the space between them. To clarify their relationship, I begin by discussing the ethical framework from which the local social policy of Antwerp is operating.

In Antwerp, cooperation between the City and civil society tends to be "overshadowed by the primacy of politics" (S. Van Dam, 2016, p. 56). Following the turn in legislature in 2019, with the alderman for social affairs now being a member of the socialist party, much has changed in terms of local social policy and emergency aid in particular. Whereas policies around food aid used to be organized ad hoc and fragmented with support depending on political ties, now a regulation ensures equality in governmental support, according to an Antwerp local social policy employee (I43). This regulation, moreover, conveys a clear *ethical* stance concerning food distributions, stressing their potential as low-threshold entries for realizing social rights in other domains. In particular, the regulation aims to transform food "distributions" in food "points" where receivers can choose their own products, meet others and receive tools to gain access to integral help. In exchange for financial support, it expects food initiatives to adopt the following qualitative guidelines: displaying respect for diversity, offering a warm welcome, providing a space of encounter, emphasizing participation/social activation of the receivers, detecting social needs, referring to other instances when needed, offering freedom of choice, avoiding food waste, maintaining clear communication, having a respectful volunteering policy, and engaging in networking with other organizations (D38). Simultaneously, however, the City is well

aware of the fact that these organizations rely on volunteers who are attached to certain ways of doing things and whose motivation is intimately tied up with particular ethical or religious beliefs. By using the word "guideline" rather than "criterium", in this respect, the regulation emphasizes the freedom of the organizations in question to fill terms like "participation" or "encounter" with their own meaning (I43).

From a postsecular perspective, this regulation is interesting for two reasons. First, it forms in part a response to the civil society action group "Platform Emergency Aid Under Protest" (PNoP), which emerged from Catholic circles in 1997 and mobilized Christian values in order to resist food distributions becoming instruments in a failing structural poverty policy, as well as to signal the insufficiency of the subsistence level in Flanders. Currently, PNoP brings together many Christian and non-Christian food distributing initiatives in Antwerp around the common concern of food. The platform and its effects, it could be argued, somehow demonstrate the transforming potential of religious and postsecular ethics in welfare regimes. It illuminates food initiatives as "spaces of care that potentially serve to articulate a newly emerging and not yet fully formed ethical and political response to welfare 'in the meantime'" (Cloke, May, & Williams, 2017). Secondly, one can argue, considering the room the regulation leaves for interpretation, stepping in the regulation opens up a potential postsecular space between the City and Harvest for welfare concepts and practices from different faith registers to interact and cross over in the practice of food distribution.

Up to now, however, only about half of the 25 food initiatives the City cooperates with (i.e. refers to) have decided to join the regulation (I43, D39). Harvest is not among them. Rather, Harvest's partnership with the OCMW intentionally remains pragmatic, that is, limited to the referral of people in need. For Harvest, on the one hand, this partnership facilitates the selection of officially needy people, which does not only assure the acquisition of food products from FEAD, but also serves the just discussed moral boundaries which hinge on the instrumentalization of receivers as "needy". For established secular actors including the OCMW, on the other, this pragmatic rapprochement assists in their task of realizing citizens' social rights, considering the fact that mechanisms of income distribution currently fall short. However, whereas the City seeks closer rapprochement in order to perform that task in a more dignified way, Harvest prefers maintaining its independence. This, I suggest, has to do with the following paradox: Further rapprochement would require a reconsideration of the very giver-receiver dynamics which led Harvest to partner up with the OCMW in the first place. Rather than postsecularity, in other words, this pragmatic relationship creates ethical deadlock.

Ronald in this respect states that, although Harvest's communication with the City is good, "they also know, they should not interfere with what I decide. If they send someone, I still always decide if I do it yes or no". Being in the midst of the covid pandemic, he also notices: "This year they know me better than the other years". Two months earlier, Ronald tells me, he held a zoom meeting with city employees who wished to work together more closely and wanted Harvest to join the regulation. But he was not interested: "When you've been building something for 27 years and have 7 departments, you don't need anyone to tell you what to do" (I40). Asking him for his opinion on the evolution of food distributions becoming food "points", he answers he does not understand the fuzz: "Everyone does it with queues", he says, "it has always been this way". The city employee who stands in communication with the food initiatives confirms during our conversation that she expects Harvest to try to maintain its independence for as long as possible, which, she underlines, is its full right (I43). However, she admits, it would be in the city's advantage if Harvest, being one the largest food initiatives in Antwerp, would join the regulation.

This delicate pragmatic equilibrium might come to be disrupted due to a financial challenge, however. In the coming year, the catholic school providing Harvest with a free warehouse will sell its buildings. "We will have to find another organization. Because we have no money. It won't be easy. We only have one year left", says Ada. Before 2019, the city employee says, it would have been possible to support Harvest with renting subsidies. But under the new regulation, any support the city offers to one of the food initiatives must be offered to all of them. This situation puts a pressure on Harvest to reconsider its participation in the regulation. If Harvest would decide to step in anyway, it is not unlikely that a postsecular repositioning of ethical values would take place. In that case, however, it is fair to say that any postsecular rapprochement would be owing to the power relations structuring it rather than to an organically grown "bubbling up of ethical values" (Cloke et al. 2019, p. 3).

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a case in which collaboration between an evangelical food distribution and secular formal welfare actors remains stuck at the level of pragmatics. In so doing, it has provided nuance to rosy and linear narratives seeing postsecular rapprochement as a natural outcome of cross-faith collaboration. In the case addressed, by contrast, the very factors that underscored the *pragmatic* rapprochement between the OCMW and the evangelical food distribution were the ones to prevent *ethical* crossovers from evolving. This paradox underscores the importance of studying pragmatic rapprochement as a pattern in its own right. Not only it probably forms a common pattern in disorganized welfare mixes marked by all kinds of cross-faith partnerships, also it can teach us more

about the conditions and relations of power undergirding (non-)postsecularity. Both pragmatic and postsecular rapprochement in this respect could be understood as potential outcomes of strategics and resource-dependency, especially in the case of public-private partnerships.

Chapter 8: Subversive Love of Neighbor

8.1. Intro

Through the epistemological category of "charity", the solidarities of churches have come to be understood in stark opposition to institutionalized, secular(ized) forms of welfare during the 20th century (Fluit, 2024, pp. 7-10). Most notably, they have become framed as voluntarist, paternalist, and ineffective, perpetuating rather than resolving structural inequalities (Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Ticktin, 2011). In this chapter, I challenge this binary by discussing a final pattern which I call "subversive love of neighbor". This pattern does not involve direct interaction nor postsecular rapprochement between religious and secular welfare actors per se. Rather, it pertains to those religiously informed solidarity practices that implicitly call into question the (secular) socio-political climate by redrawing the lines of exclusion typically adopted by secular, formal welfare actors.

The chapter draws on a case study of a weekly food distributing initiative called "Rescue Operation" (RO) organized by a local Spanish-speaking evangelical church and aimed at assisting the homeless in Antwerp. Although the church does not directly engage with other welfare actors, its food distribution implicitly challenges the methods of a nearby CAW homeless shelter and makes the issue of homelessness visible in public space, however in the margins. Distinctive in this respect is the role of religious faith and imaginary imbricating the solidarity act. In what follows, I will introduce the concept of "subversive love of neighbor" and distinguish three dimensions in how it may manifest, namely space, time and subject relations. Subsequently, I will use ethnographic fragments to provide insight into how these dimensions take shape in the RO food distribution.

8.2. Subversive love of neighbor?

"Subversive love of neighbor" points to how religiously informed forms of solidarity may redraw and implicitly call into question the boundaries of exclusion typically employed in secular, formal spaces of care. It resonates with and draws upon the concept of "subversive humanitarianism" introduced by Belgian sociologist Robin Vandevoordt (Vandevoordt, 2019, 2021). "Humanitarianism", he writes, refers to the "imperative 'to assist fellow human beings and to alleviate suffering', without 'necessarily act[ing] to defend violated rights'" (Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019, p. 104; citing R. A. Wilson & Brown, 2008, p. 11). "Subversive" refers to the tendency of going "against the grain of the ruling or dominant political climate and the lines of exclusion that were drawn by policymakers" (Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019, p. 103). Subversive humanitarianism, then, is defined as a morally motivated "form of direct action that gains political momentum precisely through its apolitical

appearance" (Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019, p. 124). As an example, Vandevoordt refers to the civil refugee support initiative that arose in 2015 in Brussels to cater for the basic needs in the refugee camp in the Maximiliaanpark. Through this platform, citizens provided food, clothes, medicines, and tents while both the state and professional NGOs remained largely absent. All of this took place in an unremarkable public parc next to official government buildings, turning it into a symbolic site of solidarity and setting the topic on the public agenda.

Considering the constitutive weight and unique effects of religious faith and forms of postsecularity in producing what Vandevoordt understands as subversive in our case under study, I will speak of subversive "love of neighbor" rather than "humanitarianism". Although both can be viewed as forms of bottom-up solidarity, the focus of the latter remains on saving lives in the immanent world, while the center of the former lies on other- rather than (only) this-worldly salvation. I moreover opt for the term "love of neighbor" rather than "charity" or "caritas", considering that the former is much more entrenched in evangelical vocabulary, while the latter tend to be associated with Catholicism (Cloke et al., 2005, p. 392). All three concepts, however, have become entangled in the same modern narrative that frames them as ineffective, paternalist and voluntarist in the face of rationalized (and secular) forms of solidarity (Fluit, 2024, pp. 7-10). In speaking of "subversive" I aim to add nuance to these presumptions.

Before substantiating subversive love of neighbor with a case study, I clarify my understanding of subversiveness by distinguishing three levels across which it can manifest, namely "space", "time" and "subject relations". On all of these levels, subversive love of neighbor implicitly calls into question the way in which formal, secular welfare services typically operate by providing an alternative. Although I realize that not all formal services function in the ways in which I will describe them now, this ideal-typical image will help me highlight what I understand by subversive.

8.3. Three levels of subversiveness

First, I suggest, the subversiveness of a solidarity practice may reside in its interaction with space and place. Formal welfare services usually operate within fixed, indoor spaces of care, such as day centers and drop-inn centers, where clients are required to meet specific formal criteria and conditions in order to gain access (Johnsen, Cloke, & May, 2005). The design of such spaces often reflects normative values, and in so doing they may perpetuate ideological divides and hierarchies between professional givers and clients (Gillespie, 2002). Subversive love of neighbor transcends such fixed notions of space organized along public-private lines. Vandevoordt identifies two ways in which engagement with space

gives an action a subversive character. First, he argues, it entails creating spaces of spontaneous encounter, unmediated by professional instances (Vandevoordt, 2019, p. 255). This, he suggests, might foster the creation of contacts beyond one's own group and rework hierarchical dynamics of care. Second, it involves turning "invisible places into symbolically significant sites of contentious solidarity" (also Johnsen et al., 2005, p. 334; Vandevoordt, 2019, p. 255), thereby making a particular issue more visible and potentially setting the minds of passers-by into motion (Vandevoordt, 2019, p. 260).

Second, love of neighbor can be called subversive insofar as it surpasses the conventional time schemes adopted by formal services, such as its regulation through opening hours. By contrast, an action is considered subversive when givers follow the temporal rhythms of the recipients (Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019, p. 105). Sarah Johnsen and colleagues in this respect give the example of the soup run. They observe that "the soup run involves momentary encounters between volunteers and service users that, of all service-related encounters, are the least likely to involve the intentional (re)construction of the 'other'" (Johnsen et al., 2005, p. 334). Its transitory character, they argue, incites volunteers to give more freely, that is, by expecting less specific behavior of the receivers than in typical formal spaces of care.

Thirdly, love of neighbor can be subversive in the way it organizes social interactions and reconstitutes social subjects. According to Vandevoordt, subversive humanitarian actions transcend two modes of subjectification. On the one hand, they overcome the categorization of people as mere bodies, which derives from humanitarianism's explicit focus on saving lives. In the case of love of neighbor, one could translate this to the common critique that it reduces people to savable souls. On the other hand, subversive actions move beyond hierarchical relationships between clients and service providers, where the content of help is determined by the expertise of the professional. Instead, they assume that givers try to establish horizontal and reciprocal relationships with recipients, creating a sense of community based on the premise of equality (Monforte & Maestri, 2023; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019, p. 105).

In what follows, I will use the three levels of space, time, and subject relations as analytical entries to shed light on the subversive characteristics of RO's love of neighbor. First, I will shortly situate the case of RO.

8.4. Situating the case

Rescue Operation arose spontaneously among members of the largest Spanish-speaking evangelical church in Antwerp, which has been home to believers from Peru, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Portugal and Spain since 1995. Since around 2010, this church gathers in a terraced house near the Sint-Jansplein, one of the hotspots for homeless people to hang around during the day. On a winter day after service in 2016, some church members decided to bring these homeless coffee and sandwiches, an activity which quickly grew out to become RO.

The central station turned out being the location *par excellence* for bumping into more homeless people. At the time, a bunch of homeless people weekly gathered there to share the bread leftovers they received from a sandwich shop after its doors closed. The church members decided to tap into this activity by taking turns cooking a meal and distributing it. When the shop stopped sharing the bread, the church continued sharing the meals. Right from the start, however, Marìa says, handing over the food remained secondary to another goal, namely spreading the Message. "What exactly does that message consist of?", I ask Diego, the pastor's son. He answers: "The Message of salvation. That Jesus died on the cross for our sins. […] Those are people who are really deep in despair. Who should just realize that even if you feel rejected by practically the entire society, there really is someone who does love you and really, that you are worth something to Him. That you were created by Him and that there is a purpose to your life". He continues: "We are all in a difficult situation at one time or another. But God can give us the strength to get out of it, and that is the message we are trying to proclaim. Mainly of love" (144).

So it happened that every Thursday evening around 7.30pm, a variable group of evangelicals and homeless people (+/- 5-20) meet in the metro stop beneath the central station where they hold a prayer circle before sharing home-made Latin-American meals, juices, and waffles. After leaving the station, the church members embark on a journey alongside the square, and then by car they drive north to the neighborhood of a CAW homeless shelter where they run into other groups of homeless. This act of love of neighbor, I will argue throughout this chapter, is imbued with subversive elements on all levels discussed. In the next section, I will discuss how RO's practices interact with public urban *space*. Subsequently, I will focus on RO's notion and enactment of *time*. Finally, I will trace back their effects to the *subject relations* between givers and receivers.

8.5. Converting public space into sacred sites of love of neighbor

The first dimension on which RO's solidarity can be called subversive is the way in which it engages public space. Rather than expecting the homeless to come to a demarcated self-selected place, church

members decided to enter the lived realms of the homeless themselves: the city. In doing so, they produce what geographers have referred to as liminal spaces "beyond the officially sacred" (see Finlayson, 2017; Gökarıksel, 2009; Kong, 2010; Olson, Hopkins, Pain, et al., 2013). Such spaces, geographer Veronica Della Dora suggests, can be called "infrasecular geographies", i.e. spaces marked by complex and multi-layered coexistences of manifold religious and secular materialities (Della Dora, 2018). The meeting moments at the entrance of the metro stop under the central station form good examples of how infrasecular geographies are creatively made, unmade and remade in the homeless city, thereby blurring the secular/religious and public/private boundaries around which homeless service is usually organized, including the CAW homeless center where RO will pass by later that evening.

Several materialities are involved in this process. Most notably, the church members wear fluorescent vests and caps reading "Rescue Operation, Jesus is the right way, Jesus is the truth, Jesus is life". They hang two luminous signs with pearls on the grey concrete wall of the transit zone before the metro stop, saying "Jesus loves you" and "Be saved", and they hand over little red flyers to homeless and passers-by. They moreover gather under one of the boxes that hang on the wall of the metro station playing elevator music and use the soothing tunes to support their sermon session and prayer circle. This particular practice stresses the importance of what Amin and Thrift have called "seeing like a city", that is, viewing the city from the inside out, recognizing it as an actant rather than a mere backdrop, understanding it from the connectedness of things (Amin & Thrift, 2017). From such a perspective, Michele Lancione writes, "FBOs, as well as homeless people, are not understood as divided from (or just located in) the urban (the macro– meso perspective), but rather part of it and constituted through it" (Lancione, 2013; 2014, p. 3065).

This entanglement also shows itself in the next phases of the evening. After the Metro stop, the homeless that came scatter and each go their own way. Some homeless still join the church group for a while to chat as they continue their tour to find other groups of homeless. Intuitively, the church members seem to know where to go. Sometimes they take their trip further via the big shopping street, sometimes through the underground parking next to the metro, and sometimes via the square. In doing so, they build on the street knowledge developed over time in interaction with the homeless. Stan, a homeless man, tells me: "If you are homeless, you read the street. You see people falling off, dropping dead". Stan is aware of all charity activities taking place in the city and knows exactly what group of homeless is where at what time. He tells me he is able to deduce the location of the homeless he knows from several factors, including the weather. He often joins the church members a while on

their trip. So it happens that church members and homeless find themselves caught up in a choreography across the neighborhood of the central station, both moving between searching the other and being found.

The church's final destination is the neighborhood of the CAW homeless center in the North of Antwerp. This center presents itself as a "night shelter for homeless people with sanitary facilities, evening meal and breakfast", and with "a focus on future orientation and referral to appropriate help and services" (D41). By 8pm at the latest, homeless are expected to show up at the doors of the center if they wish to secure a bed that night. Groups of homeless, many of them sick, drunk, or high, linger in the vicinity of the center until that moment, occupying benches and curbs. In winter, they are many. In summer, they are less since most of them prefer to sleep outside and feel free. Nevertheless, many come hang around during summer, expecting the church members to bring food.

Distributing food next to a homeless center where food is served already can be considered a subversive act that implicitly questions the center's methods and potentially sets the minds of the center's staff into motion. I asked Luis, one of RO's driving forces, what the whole point is of distributing redundant food. It makes them happy, he answers: "Even though they know there is food there, they prefer our food: one, they don't like it so much and they have told us that it is not a lot of food". This, Marìa says, is intricately entangled with proving God's love: "Sometimes they sit on a bench and they know they can get food somewhere but they may not feel like going there... Then we arrive with the food close to them and they take it from us. The food is necessary, but the first goal is to proclaim the word of God" (I46).

To conclude, I argue that RO is subversive in terms of spatial conduct. In creating infrasecular geographies, RO transgresses the public-private boundaries around which the CAW homeless shelter organizes its service, thus formulating an alternative. In so doing, RO's food distribution produces a series of "complex ephemeral micro-geographies of care", as Sarah Johnsen and colleagues call them, marked by their "transitory nature, lack of rules, freedom from physical boundaries, and visibility to the public" (Johnsen et al., 2005, p. 334).

8.6. *Temporality*

RO's approach to time can be called subversive in at least two ways, – the third, I will argue, is more ambiguous.

The first is similar to how Vandevoordt characterizes humanitarianism as subversive in a temporal sense: "where civil humanitarians lived to the rhythm of their engagements" (Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019, p. 105). Likewise, the church members adopt a fluid notion of time, one which does not follow formalized categorizations but attunes to the homeless, i.e. clockless, way of life. This approach, they say, has grown through experience. Luis tells me that church members used to meet with homeless at 7pm to play music and distribute food on the De Coninckplein: "But when you say 7pm, yes, they don't look at the hour. Sometimes we had to go to station, and then they say 'oh yes, it's now, yes I'm coming'. The time is completely different". He contrasts this temporal perception with that of the CAW homeless center we were standing next to during our conversation: "Here time exists! Yes, too late is too late. When the doors are closed you are not allowed in." This fluid adoption of time arguably reflects a receptiveness to the alterity of the homeless way of living. It moreover lends the distribution a transitory character, which in itself has been argued to prompt volunteers to "give freely in and of the moment without the expectation that service users should respond in specific ways" (Johnsen et al., 2005, p. 334).

A second subversive element relates to the specific timing of the church members' arrival at the CAW homeless center, which takes place about half an hour before its doors close. In one sense, this synchronization is only a natural result of church members following the rhythm of the homeless, who are forced to adhere to the center's timetable if they wish to gain access to its night service. Yet, this specific timing results in a short-lived intersection of the otherwise distinct realms of RO and the center, accentuating their differences and highlighting the latter's shortcomings.

Usually around 20h when the center closes its doors, church members and the center's staff shortly cross paths. Sometimes, they exchange leftover food packages or share information about a particular homeless person or charity event. Now and then, however, they are confronted with one or more homeless who are not allowed to enter the center due to legal restrictions – in order to be accepted, homeless must either have been in Belgium for six months or have started a procedure at the application center for asylum seekers in Brussels. In such cases, church members help in finding a solution to get these people through the night. Once, for instance, two men who just arrived in Belgium were not allowed to spend the night in the center, after which church members sent them to the nearby mosque where further referrals would be made. While ROs specific timing, in this example, allowed for the creation of complementarity between the practices of the center and the church, it also served as a strong reminder to the center's staff of its limitations.

The third way is more ambiguous and bound up with eschatology. According to the church members, belief in eternity produces subversiveness in two ways. On the one hand, attaining eternity forms a key motivation behind their practice of love of neighbor, producing an unconditionality or a going-beyond-the-self. Important in this respect, Luis tells me one evening, is the belief that "our right hand does not need to know what our left hand is doing", and that "instant glory is unimportant". In church, the following was preached: "When I want more recognition for the instrument than for what God does, those 5 minutes are my glory. It is very easy to take the glory to ourselves. We do say 'all glory to the Lord', but we are so quick to compare ourselves to our brother. The pride wants to creep in so easily". By contrast, "when the reason I want to help someone is moved by my desire to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, we can be sure we will know eternal glory" (D40).

On the other hand, according to Diego, the prospect of afterlife enables making "a structural change" in the lives of the homeless, providing them with a sense of agency and self-worth (I44). Luis responded the following to a homeless man who asked him why RO did not advertise for its activities: "We don't want subsidies or structural aid at all. Then we would be too busy organizing the food. For us, it is all about spreading the Word of God. That is the most important thing: we want to save you. Not just by giving food, but structurally: by being carried by God all your life and giving you eternal life". In the light of eternal life, so the idea goes, time on earth is but a phase, as is being homeless, vulnerable and excluded. "The bailiff does not visit heaven", it is preached in the prayer circle. In the end, all people are equal. By introducing the homeless to a Love that transcends their present condition, church members say they aim to inspire them in stepping out of the homeless category.

Traditionally, such emphasis on afterlife has led to the categorization of practices of love of neighbor as ineffective, namely encouraging resignation in one's fate rather than addressing problems by the root. One could question, indeed, whether the belief in eternity truly is subversive here. In the end, it still amounts to church members instrumentalizing the homeless both as savable souls and as vehicles towards their own salvation. In the next sections, therefore, I will posit that RO carries subversive elements, not per se because of its focus on salvation, but in spite of it.

This section has highlighted how RO operates within a time frame that carries subversive elements in various ways. First, rather than imposing rigid time schemes, it attunes to the rhythm of the homeless. Second, its timing half an hour prior to the closure of the homeless center accentuates the shortcomings of the latter's approach. Third, church members act in the light of afterlife. Although they assert this engenders a going-beyond-the-self and helps homeless regain their value as persons

beyond the homelessness category, I have suggested it still involves instrumentalizing them. As I will discuss now, the religious notion of time in RO is intricately knitted into relations between givers and receivers. Although at times ambiguously, I will argue that these relations contain subversive elements.

8.7. Subject relations and social interactions

Based on the interviews I held before starting field work, I prepared myself to encounter the following dynamic: church members impose the Word, and the homeless tolerate this only in exchange for food. Soon, I realized this was a preconception I needed to reassess. While joining the Rescue Operations on Thursday, I witnessed how church members' faithful dispositions opened up a space for dialogue over shared matters of meaning, thereby creating a (short-lived) being-togetherness amidst and across (religious) difference. This togetherness was not generated by the kind of receptive generosity conceptualized by Cloke and colleagues, namely as a radical openness to difference. Rather, it was the religious imaginary itself that carried in some way a unifying and horizontalizing force. This, I will suggest, was facilitated by the role of God as a third party between givers and receivers, although in an ambiguous fashion. Before addressing these relationships, it is useful to discuss the ethical dispositions of the givers.

8.7.1. Ethics of the givers

Given their primary goal of bringing the homeless to God, one cannot characterize RO church members as truly receptive towards otherness. Rather, most of the church members' giving is guided by an ethos which ambiguously marks a certain openness to difference, while displaying no genuine willingness to let go of the hope that the other would eventually receive the wisdom to convert (see also chapter 4, p. 66). Behind this ambiguity lie two theological principles.

First is the command to love even your enemy, Marìa explains: "For your enemy, you have to be ready to help. Because taking care of your child, your husband, and your mother, anyone can do that. So Lise, true love goes beyond that" (146). Also Luis tells me: "that's a high bar, and it's very difficult to love someone you don't like, and especially someone who is hostile to you, but yes, if we really want to please Jesus and if we really have the love of God in our lives, then we will be led by the Holy Spirit to give love to the other" (145). The command of loving your "enemies" (also meaning here, the ones that do not resemble oneself) leads church members to go far beyond their own faith, ethnic and language group and embrace a wide array of difference. And yet, fully accepting other faith dispositions has been challenging. Luis in this respect says: "We know, the only way that we can have deliverance is through Jesus Christ. So, there is no other way, there are other religions, but yes" (I45).

His following quote captures well how RO church members engage with religious difference: "We are open, but we can never go against our beliefs. We do it with respect. We try to respect everybody's opinion, we also try not to argue. If we tell you that the only one who can cleanse our life is Jesus Christ, and you come to argue, and we don't believe in that, okay that's your opinion. We can't force you. And for us, it's not that we then continue the conversation to try to change you. We try not to argue because that doesn't help anybody. So, we try to tell you the truth, but if no one believes that, then yes, our opinion remains the same and we respect your opinion" (I45).

Second is the statement derived from Romans 10:17-21 saying "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God". This is a principle which is occasionally reiterated by church members. For instance, when I asked Manuel about his reason to continue helping homeless every Thursday in spite of knowing that the majority will never turn to God, which after all remained ROs ultimate goal, his answer echoed this biblical principle: "That's no big deal! The important thing is that they hear about Him. Maybe something will start working subconsciously". While this principle prompts the church members to constantly bring up their faith, it does so in a manner that leaves room for the homeless to interpret it at their own discretion. Even, it creates opportunities for conversations on topics like love, friendship, fear or afterlife, as I will illustrate now.

8.7.2. Creating in-commonness

Two dynamics cause homeless and church members to create a sense of togetherness in spite of difference. The first lies in the ability of church members and especially homeless to suspend their disbelief and partake in what sociologist Timothy Stacey calls "performative postsecularism", in which people across faith boundaries engage with a (religious or secular) imaginary that, even if not rationally believed by all, ignites the imagination and encourages creating a shared world (Stacey, 2017). The second is the role of God in the evangelical imaginary, which arguably horizontalizes the relationships between givers and receivers.

8.7.2.1. Performative postsecularism

"Performative postsecularism" was introduced by sociologist Timothy Stacey as a response to the tendency of both Habermas and Cloke and Beaumont to conceive of respectively complementary learning and postsecular rapprochement as products of reason rather than enactment and performance. Postsecular rapprochement, indeed, relies on the idea that people set aside the dogma's that divide them in order to enter joint praxis, which in turn may open up a space for the crossing over of these dogma's. This, Stacey writes, "might be read as suggesting that myth [or dogma] is

epiphenomenal and that only rational construction is valid" (Stacey, 2017, p. 147). Instead, he proposes, we could start considering the imagination-inspiring language of dogma itself as a potential factor for fostering solidarity across faith boundaries. The concept of performative postsecularism therefore calls for evaluating imaginaries "on the basis of the performances they produce", rather than on their internal coherence (Stacey, 2017, p. 141). During field work, I experienced how a dynamic of performative postsecularism unfolded between RO givers and receivers, granting a sense of agency to the latter and thus carrying a transformative or subversive potential.

Evangelical language imbues RO in the form of myriad Hallelujah's, bless you's and Amen's. Sara, a church member, for instance, addresses each homeless person individually with "you are special" while handing over flyers of the church. Isabella, another church member, does the same thing, cheering "God bless you". Luis too does it when bumping into homeless he knew, saying things like: "A, Victoria! God love you! Victoria! Abdul! God still love you, you know that"? Although the majority of homeless is non-believing or Muslim, many of them seem to enjoy being addressed in this way. Some of them even reply with a "Bless you" without identifying as Christian.

Rather than simply imposing a Christian worldview on homeless people, the use of Christian imaginary in RO creates an atmosphere of conviviality and openness that (usually) does not reflect nor provoke strategic or pragmatic behavior. One evening, for instance, church members asked a crying homeless woman about her day. "It was terrible", she answered hopeless, trying to elicit a reaction of two church members. "I got kicked out of the center because I kept picking fights". This initiated a conversation between a group of homeless and church members over how that could have happened, and whether she could forgive herself like God had forgiven her. Subsequently, the woman expressed feeling significantly better. Another time, an atheist homeless man, seated at a bus stop, mentioned his loneliness. Luis asked through and he and the others eventually promised to pray for him at home and together in church. The man answered soothed: "I did need a little love and like, thank you". Finally, it struck me how, sometimes, homeless joined RO in the area of the CAW homeless center just to partake in the atmosphere. Once, for instance, two homeless men and one woman gathered with the group. I offered them a food package, which they refused. "We receive food inside", they answered. They did, however, mingle in the ongoing conversations.

By joining and performing a Christian language register, homeless seem to include themselves in "an imagined world that is barely even explicated let alone rationally construed or empirically observable" (Stacey, 2017, p. 19). The following fragment is a typical example of a conversation held during RO

between homeless and church members. It portrays how a non-believing homeless man possesses the imaginative power to engage in a belief system that is not his. He later told me that being part of this kind of conversations forms an important incentive for him to attend the station gathering every Thursday.

> Luis: "Grace is for everyone, everyone can receive it, but the question is: does everyone accept that grace? That's different."
> Stan: "Because I am a sinner, I can't receive it!"
> Luis: "Yes you can!"
> Stan: "That's new to me"
> Luis: "If I say 'I have received the grace', does that mean I do nothing wrong?"
> Stan: "Yes"
> Luis: "Not really. That's why we call it grace: we don't deserve it. I still need grace all the time because I am a human being, I am not perfect, none of us is perfect."
> Stan: "No, far from it, me anyway."

Another example relates to conversations between church members and Islamic homeless over what is haram and halal. In these conversations, both parties engage with the imaginary of the other in order to come to a compromise. Once, for instance, Manuel told these homeless he was not sure the food was halal that time, after which a discussion began and the homeless ultimately concluded: "food is food". Also telling in this regard is how interactions between evangelical givers and Islamic receivers organically become a mix of "Hallelujah's" and "Mashallah's", as both parties use their own faith logics and language in reaching out to one another and create a communal zone of action. For instance:

> Isabella (gives food): "Remain blessed. God loves you."
> Homeless Muslim: "May God pay you for your good deeds".
> Isabella: "Amen".

Arguably, a form of postsecularity is created here through collective "performance" rather than through rational dialogue in the Habermasian sense. This confirms Stacey's proposal that "rather than putting the onus on the beholders of myths to rationally translate them, it might be just as easy to imagine the outsider dispending their disbelief to partake in the performance of a myth and to judge it on the basis of the kinds of behaviours it produces" (Stacey, 2017, p. 6). In the case of RO, the

evangelical language which is centered around concepts like "heaven", "grace" and "love" provides a safe discursive space for homeless to shelter from their harsh realities, whatever their beliefs.

At the same time, however, this affective sphere through which postsecularity is "performed" remains bound to the specific time and space of RO and does not stretch to evangelical Christian initiatives in general. When church members invite homeless to charity actions of befriended churches, for instance, homeless mostly react somewhat skeptical. Once, they tell me, they had been invited to a food distribution in a Brazilian church in Antwerp where they were obliged to participate in the church service before receiving food. "It felt disrespectful", they say, "to arrive like that after the service and be visibly 'the one who came after food'". The atmosphere, moreover, remains fragile and fleeting, sharing resemblances with the postsecular spheres between pilgrims of different faith in Santiago de Compostela studied by Nilsson and Tesfahuney (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016). These postsecular spheres were mobile and fluctuating, in a constant state of becoming. In RO, the sphere is not activated every Thursday evening either, nor is it equally strong at all times or places as it travels with the church members and homeless throughout the city. By contrast, it highly depends on the weather and the mood of individuals. It is necessary mentioning, moreover, that accepting the food is not equally void of shame or pragmatics for every homeless person.

8.7.2.2. God as intermediary

The performative force of the RO imaginary, I will suggest now, was fostered by the central role of God in it, which in a way horizontalized relationships between givers and receivers.

In RO, giving works within the logics of a triad, with the act of exchange between giver and receiver being intermediated by God (see Henig, 2019; Mittermaier, 2019). On the one hand, most church members believe that God uses them to help brothers and sisters in need. According to Manuel, the decision for RO to take place every Thursday night is not theirs; it is a divine instruction. Giving, in this respect, is not so much something one does "for men" as it is something one does for God (D40). Luis says: "When I help someone, that is like giving to God" (145). On the other, they believe that God will *reward* them for taking this intermediate position. The blessings in question range from eternal life to finding a job, to the joy one experiences when having given someone food.

This triadic dynamic in se can hardly be called subversive. It does not counter classical critiques of charity and love of neighbor involving "the enforcement of the spiritual onto the other" (Cloke et al., 2005, p. 392), neither does it incite on questioning the socio-political status quo. Nevertheless, my

claim holds that it is amongst others this triad which allows for the emergence of the kind of performative postsecularism just described, which I consider subversive since it creates a temporary sense of community. First, it “protects the recipients from having to be grateful and from having to reciprocate” (Mittermaier, 2019, p. 4). Second, in some way, it creates a going-beyond-the self among the church members, conceiving of themselves as mere pass-throughs between God and the homeless.

This is well illustrated by the role of God in including Muslims in the distribution. Luis says (emphasis added): “Most of the people who prepare food in our church live near our church, and the shops that are there, the butcher’s or whatever, are all Muslim, so *thanks to God those are halal*”. This logic, I suggest, horizontalizes relationships between evangelical givers and Islamic receivers, freeing the latter from the expectation of showing gratitude and performing humility. Put differently, it relieves pressure from the distribution act and facilitates the collective performance and construction of an evangelical/postsecular imaginary across faith boundaries.

8.7.3. Subversive subject relations?

RO, I have suggested, creates an informal space of encounter for church members and homeless of different faith to enter into dialogue over shared matters of meaning. Rather than by a radical openness to difference, this being-togetherness is undergirded by the ability of church members and especially homeless to move themselves into the imaginary of the other and co-construct it. I have argued that this form of “performative postsecularism”, which provides a safe place for homeless to temporarily escape their tough realities, is paradoxically facilitated by the intermediary role of God. Indeed, although the triad giver-God-receiver implies instrumentalizing the homeless as savable souls, it also provides a framework which detaches the food transaction from any particular giver-receiver relationship, creating an unconditionality among the church members and freeing the homeless from the expectation of showing gratitude. RO’s subject relations therefore can be argued to contain subversive elements, creating liminal spaces marked by new articulations between religious and secular sensibilities, however volatile, fragile and in the margins.

8.8. Subversive love of neighbor in RO?

I have used space, time, and subject relations as analytical entries to shed light on the subversive characteristics of RO’s love of neighbour.

First, I have argued that RO's practices turned "invisible places into symbolically significant sites of contentious solidarity" (Vandevoordt, 2019, p. 255). By fusing evangelical materialities into urban infrastructure, RO transformed unremarkable places such as the transit zone beneath the central station into "infrasecular geographies" where church members and homeless in their interplay created a spontaneous sense of place that was ever in genesis. In doing so, RO transgressed the public-private boundaries around which the nearby CAW homeless center was organized and combined spreading the Message with raising awareness about the cause of homelessness, however in the margins.

Second, I have suggested that RO can be called subversive in terms of time. Not only did RO attune to the rhythms of the homeless rather than the other way round, also it accentuated the shortcomings of the CAW homeless center by arriving half an hour prior to the closure of its doors. Intrinsically entangled in the distribution act, moreover, was the church members' prospect of afterlife. According to church members themselves, this timeframe created a going-beyond-the-self and served as an instrument to help the homeless in structurally overcoming homelessness. I have stated, however, that this focus on salvation still involved instrumentalizing the homeless. If RO has subversive characteristics, this was not because of but in spite of its focus on salvation.

Third was related to subject relations. Although RO failed in transcending the critique that love of neighbor categorizes people as savable souls, it did succeed in creating a sense of equality and communality. In particular, I have argued, through performative postsecularism, homeless across faith boundaries engaged in and co-constructed an evangelical imaginary, using it as a communal space regardless of its veracity. This, I have suggested, was facilitated by God as a third actor mediating the distribution act, protecting the givers from acting morally superior and the receivers from the need to show gratitude.

8.9. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a final religious-secular pattern which I have called "subversive love of neighbor". This pattern does not entail postsecular rapprochements with other welfare actors per se. Rather, it implicitly calls into question the way in which formal, secular welfare services typically operate by adopting an alternative frame of space, time, and subject relations. Important, in this respect, the ways in which religious faith is entangled in the practice, forming a key force in producing what Vandevoordt understands as subversive.

Just like the patterns discussed in previous chapters, subversive love of neighbor should be approached as a lens rather than a rigid category, meaning it may manifest itself in just one or more facets of a religiously inspired solidarity while others remain ambiguous or open to interpretation. Approaching charities and practices of love of neighbor through the lens of subversive love of neighbor challenges the view of them being inherently voluntarist, paternalist and ineffective. It underscores that the very act of filling the gaps can at times be considered subversive, even in the absence of partnerships with (in)formal actors.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored the roles of Evangelical inspired solidarities in the Flemish welfare regime. I started from the observation that sociology's concepts of solidarity have remained defined predominantly in structural and secular terms, eclipsing the emergence of new, bottom up initiatives, including religiously-inspired articulations of solidarity and love of neighbor. By contrast, I adopted the postsecular perspective developed by human geographers Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont, which enabled to examine the interplay of the religious and the secular in ways that depart from a priori viewing them as antithetical. By turning the gaze to a young minority religion in a traditionally corporatist welfare context, I have complicated the assertions made by these scholars, in particular their rosy portrayal of what they have called "postsecular rapprochement", i.e. the coming-together of religious and secular voices around shared concerns such as poverty, creating liminal spaces of religious-secular crossing over. Starting from the assumption that, in current complex and dynamic welfare and religious landscapes, postsecular rapprochement cannot be but one religious-secular pattern among many others, I discerned five other articulations between the religious and the secular. These included respectively "stretched postsecular rapprochement", "parallel moral economies", "semiotic guerilla", "pragmatic rapprochement", and "subversive love of neighbor".

In the following sections, I will reflect on my findings in the light of the four dimensions of postsecular theory outlined in chapter one; an *empirical, analytical, philosophical* and *epistemological* dimension. Regarding the first, I will evaluate whether the Flemish welfare and evangelical contexts can indeed be considered fruitful soils for studying dynamics of postsecular rapprochement as suggested in chapter 2. In relation to the second and the third, I will discuss the five religious-secular patterns I have discerned using the postsecular as an analytical lens, and whether they may bring us closer to a postsecular society as envisaged by Habermas. Finally, I will shortly evaluate the postsecular perspective I used, and whether it is in need of revision.

9.1. The Flemish welfare and evangelical landscape: hotbeds for postsecular engagements?

In chapter 2, I formulated the hypothesis that the Flemish welfare landscape lends itself particularly well for an inquiry into new articulations between welfare subjects (givers, receivers, organizations, semi-governmental bodies) of different faith. Rather than attributing this to wholesale neo-liberalization, as did Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont, I owed this to the (further) subsidiarization of social policy since the 1970s, which resulted in a "disorganized" or "post-corporatist" welfare mix. This arguably transformed the local level into "a social laboratory" (Andreotti et al., 2012, p. 66;

Kazepov, 2010, p. 66), opening up space for unconventional welfare actors, among whom emerging evangelical congregations and FBOs. I have moreover suggested that some theological and practical shifts have led the latter to become more receptive toward forms of cooperation and postsecular rapprochement despite their traditional fundamentalist aura.

My findings have confirmed these hypotheses. A lot is moving on the intersection between welfare and Evangelical Christianity in Flanders. New connections are being forged, as suggested by the case studies underpinning the chapters on stretched postsecular rapprochement, semiotic guerrilla and pragmatic rapprochement in particular. But although local welfare mixes have indeed created opportunities for evangelicals to dedicate their resources and faith motivation to jointly helping people in need, some indisputable factors have hindered or complicated this from (smoothly) happening in practice. During my research, I detected three in particular.

The first is the challenge to navigate a historically pillarized welfare landscape deeply molded by Catholicism. Although disorganized welfare mixes did technically open up space for new religious actors, centuries-old Catholic models of charity continue to shape expectations of solidarity being organized in a structured and consistent manner and, geographically, as "nests of Russian dolls" first reaching those people geographically closest by (see Amin, 2004; Massey, 2004). These expectations stand in contrast to the spontaneous, volatile and transnational character of the solidarities exercised by evangelicals, whose deeply ingrained aversion to structures traces back to the Reformation. The cases underpinning chapter 4, 6 and 7 have illustrated how evangelicals in this respect have begun to experiment with new forms, such as the parachurch organization, in seeking creative ways for reconciling these conflicting approaches. Stretched postsecular rapprochement in this respect has proved to be a useful configuration for overcoming such hurdles.

Second is the remaining struggle of evangelicals with genuinely displaying receptive generosity towards other faiths. Although gradual shifts towards praxis and the here-and-now have indeed produced fragments of postsecular repositioning and theo-ethics, their persisting focus on conversionism is what has hindered them from entering into contacts, partnerships, and rapprochements with other faith actors. This has been especially the case for the neo-Pentecostal communities I studied, where a spiritual warfare discourse contributed to the continuous reproduction of religious-secular dichotomies which neither emanated from nor created rapprochement with secular welfare actors (see chapter 5 and 6). However, chapter 4 has shown how learning via multiple levels of interaction may partly resolve such tensions.

Third, while disorganized welfare mixes yield creativity and innovation, they also run the risk of systematic organizational failure due to territorial fragmentation, conflict, and a loss of control on the part of governments (Andreotti et al., 2012; Bode, 2006; Kazepov, 2010). As illustrated in chapter 6 about the semiotic guerilla pattern, indeed, structural gaps in local welfare mixes can easily create avenues for ethically incompatible welfare actors to step in, resulting in forms of religious-secular interaction that are by no means marked by postsecular rapprochement. Put differently, although disorganized welfare mixes foster the creation of new relations across difference, the question should always remain: what kind of relations?

Taken together, although the subsidiarization of social policy and the recent shifts within the Flemish evangelical landscape have indeed created opportunities for the emergence of new relations across religious-secular boundaries, the road remains riddled with obstacles. Precisely this, however, is what has enabled me to lay bare patterns of religious-secular interaction beyond the classical postsecular rapprochement, the conceptual contours of which have remained underpinned by research on historical majority religions in traditionally Protestant and heavily neoliberalized contexts like the UK, the Netherlands, and the US. In the next section, I will reflect on the five patterns I have discerned and the purpose they may serve.

9.2. Five religious-secular patterns beyond postsecular rapprochement

Drawing on seven case studies in the cities of Ghent and Antwerp, selected to represent maximum variation, I have identified five patterns characterizing the interplay between evangelical initiatives and their largely secularized Flemish welfare landscape. These included respectively "stretched postsecular rapprochement", "parallel moral economies", "semiotic guerrilla", "pragmatic rapprochement", and "subversive love of neighbor". What purpose now may these patterns serve?

First of all, it is worth mentioning that this collection of religious-secular patterns is not exhaustive. Taking other welfare contexts, religious landscapes, religious traditions or initiatives as cases would without doubt reveal additional patterns, as has been suggested by Cloke and Beaumont (Cloke et al., 2019, pp. 155-184 chapter 6). Some contexts in this respect strike me as particularly promising for future research. India, for instance, with its peculiar interpretation of state secularism and its longstanding experience with religious pluralism, has been proposed as a fascinating case in terms of postsecular dynamics (e.g. Bhargava, 2015; Cloke et al., 2019, pp. 169-173; Osuri, 2012). Sub-Saharan African regions form intriguing cases too, given the recent meteoric rise of and fierce competition between Islam and neo-Pentecostalism, both navigating complex relationships with unstable

democratic regimes (e.g. Pace, 2016). Latin American contexts like Brazil where neo-Pentecostalism has started to supersede liberation theology, especially among the poor, spark the postsecular imagination as well (e.g. Cartledge, 2021; Oosterbaan, 2010). Studying these contexts will be essential, moreover, to remove Western bias from the postsecular toolbox (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 155), a call which this research could only partially answer given its focus on a West-European, historically Christian context. The questions then arise, however, to what extent a postsecular perspective presumes the existence of a liberal democracy, at what point a liberal democracy – always imperfect in its implementation – stops being one, and whether we might consider taking the presence of religious diversity as a sufficient condition for applying the postsecular perspective of Cloke and Beaumont. Within West European welfare regimes, future research should further examine the roles of non-Christian faith traditions, such as Islam, which experiences higher levels of stigmatization and racialization than any other religious tradition in the West, yet actively engages in practices of solidarity led by the principles of zakat and sadaqa (Dierckx, Kerstens, et al., 2009; Kayikci, 2020). Simultaneously, I view it as a merit of this study that it has shifted the focus away from the Muslim question and turned the gaze towards a religious tradition that is typically not at the forefront of public debate in Europe, but equally epitomizes the recent resurgence of religion in Western secularized societies (Marshall, 2010, p. 297). In so doing, this study has contributed to the surprisingly scarce and fragmented body of literature on evangelical Christianity in Flanders. Finally, the patterns I detected can be expected to occur in and take other interesting shapes in a plethora of contexts outside welfare, just as postsecularity does – Cloke in this respect has differentiated spaces of care, spaces of resistance, spaces of ethical identity, spaces of protest, spaces of reconciliation, and spaces of charitable cross-subsidy (Cloke et al., 2019, pp. 90-93).

Neither are these patterns mutually exclusive. One can, for instance, detect fragments of pragmatic rapprochement in the stretched mode of postsecular rapprochement discussed in chapter 4 – the Church of Christ's decision to tie into Heart community was driven by pragmatism, as did Hearts initial choice to seek rapprochement with CaP. One could argue, moreover, that pragmatic rapprochement can work as a tool in the construction of a parallel moral economy, as did the occasional contacts between Miracle church for all People Ghent and public welfare centers. One can even view semiotic guerilla as a form of pragmatic rapprochement in itself, albeit one characterized by a lack of transparency in the stakes involved for one of the parties. Likewise, all of the patterns discussed could carry subversive elements. For instance, the act of MCaP to provide shelter to the undocumented during their process of obtaining papers could be considered subversive. In the stretched rapprochement between the City of Ghent, Cap, and Heart, subversiveness of the latter two

was a prerequisite to receive subsidies of the former, institutionalized in the so-called "protest function" (p. 61). In the pragmatic rapprochement between Harvest and the city of Antwerp, the formers resistance to engage in subversive actions and relations was what hindered it from evolving into postsecular rapprochement. Finally, one can imagine that semiotic guerilla occurs within a stretched configuration.

In other words, these patterns are fluid, and they should be approached as such. Rather than as rigid categories, they serve as tools or lenses for grasping and coping with what is moving within the welfare-religion nexus. In so doing, they may help professionals, volunteers and church members in the fields of social welfare, social policy, and religion to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and struggles at play at a certain moment in time and choose appropriate strategies for communication. Most of all, it is my hope that these tools can incite citizens across faith boundaries to open up to each other and let go of the deeply rooted idea in Flanders and elsewhere that beliefs, much like political preferences, resist open discussion and should remain private concerns. If I have learned anything from this research, it is that beliefs are not trivial; they highly inform practices and structure social realities. Striving for a society where people of all faith live together means facing the importance of openly recognizing difference and truly learning to agree to disagree within the limits of liberal democracy. It also involves acknowledging that growing pains, struggles, and conflict situations form an inherent part of all this. The five patterns discerned in this research may form heuristic devices in this collective learning process.

9.3. A postsecular perspective in need of revision?

To identify these five patterns, I have made use of the postsecular conceptual apparatus developed by human geographers Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont. Although working in the ethos of Habermas' post-secular society, this perspective turned the gaze from how the religious and the secular *should* interact to how they *do* interact, examining ways in which they become co-assembled in particular times and spaces. By focusing on a historical minority religion that has just begun to pave its way in a welfare landscape largely defined by Catholicism, however, I hoped to meet the two most common critiques on this perspective; that it lacks attention to the power dynamics shaping these co-assemblages, and that it has grounded its statements in an overly selective set of cases. What did I learn about (non)postsecularity by doing so? And was this perspective an adequate instrument epistemologically?

First, taking the historically marginal yet upcoming group of Flemish evangelicals as cases has unearthed a much less rosy and more nuanced image of faith-based initiatives in west European welfare regimes than the one proposed by Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont. Being in their infancy and struggling with receptive generosity, evangelical solidarities have forced me to consider "missed and not-yet realized opportunities" of rapprochement, as Stacey Gutowski called for (Gutkowski, 2014, p. 165). They have underscored that relations between secular and religious actors in general and postsecular rapprochements in particular cannot be understood but from their entanglements within wider relations of power. In chapter 4, for instance, the postsecularity that emerged between Cap and the city was undergirded by a combination of a depillarizing and secularizing local welfare landscape, making it *strategically* beneficial and even necessary for both parties to engage in a partnership around ethical concerns. In chapter 6, apparent rapprochement was in fact an evangelical *strategy* of semiotic guerilla, aimed at rechristianizing the system from within. This was in turn enabled because of structural gaps in the local welfare regime, *forcing* the city to work with whatever organization. Thus, rather than being a simple "bubbling up of ethical values" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 3), forms of postsecularity and cooperation in this study, if any, have been conditioned by strategical shifts, resource dependency, and pragmatic decisions.

Second, taking evangelical solidarities as cases has further illustrated that postsecularity can become a "formation" exerting power in itself (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2015; also Olson, Hopkins, & Kong, 2013). Postsecular formations in (local) welfare mixes are often shaped by longstanding dialectics between the historical majority religion and secular welfare bodies, making it more challenging for young minority religions to tie in. In chapter 4, for instance, agreeing with the postsecular composite that had grown between Cap organizations (mostly Catholic) and the Ghent City has formed a precondition for new organizations to join. This forced Heart, an evangelical organization, to find creative ways of reconciling these postsecular expectations with its own faith motivation. In chapter 7, Harvest's access to subsidies was dependent on its willingness to create a postsecular space between givers and receivers, a requirement which was an outcome of the Catholic-humanist action group PNoP. Future research should further explore how postsecular formations can act as exclusionary mechanisms or disciplinary forces for minority religions, including non-Christian ones, as well as for givers or receivers *within* spaces marked by postsecularity. This resonates with what Cloke and Beaumont suggested in the conclusion of their latest book, namely that "analysis of *actually existing* postsecularity (…) requires taking as a central concern issues of marginality, identity, and intersectionality" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 206). In this respect, they suggested that future research should

offer "an analysis of postsecularity as experienced through the unique intersections of age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, (dis)ability, and subculture" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 206).

My overall claim, in other words, holds that to take the normative ideal of a Habermasian postsecular society seriously also means to gain an understanding of the elements that *complicate* the realization of such an ideal, including hidden agendas, dynamics of enclaving, translation burdens and refusals to recognize the authority of secular law above that of God. This, I suggest, demands to break open the consensus-oriented paradigm of communication underpinning the Habermasian-inspired ideas of mutual translation and postsecular rapprochement, and complement or replace it with a framework that leaves more room for the inevitable struggles over power, mismatches and conflicts governing trajectories of rapprochement. Rhizomatic and critical assemblage thinking could form one avenue towards such an approach, Michele Lancione proposes in this respect (Lancione, 2013, 2014). Such perspective views the world more explicitly in open-ended assemblages or webs of relations through which ideas, ethics, resources and other human and non-human elements, including power, are exchanged, structured and transformed. It encourages researchers to understand social phenomena including religion and postsecularity from "their entanglements", rather than from predefined categories (see e.g. Bender, 2012; Vásquez, 2020).

During the conduct of this study, in this respect, I have often wondered whether, by using a postsecular perspective like the one of Cloke and Beaumont, I was not just reinforcing the very religious-secular binaries I was trying to overcome. This perspective, indeed, relies on the premise that the secular and the religious in their interplay create something new, a thirdspace called the postsecular. Wasn't this, as James Beckford feared for, essentializing the three of them by "waving a magic wand over all the intricacies, contradictions, and problems of what counts as religion to reduce them to a single, bland category" (Beckford, 2012, p. 17)? Wasn't this downplaying the fact that there is no such thing as *non*-hybrid praxis, discourse or ethics? Wasn't this undermining the very point I was trying to make, namely that even what has been considered purely secular, like the welfare state, is in fact laced with Christian history? Is not everything, in this sense, postsecular? What then is the value of this analytical concept? I decided once again that I should not consider these terms as rigid categories, but as analytical devices enabling to capture something that did resonate with the social reality I was studying: the categories of "religious" and "secular" were still deeply ingrained in the daily practice and discourse of the evangelical solidarity initiatives and their welfare contexts. This was especially the case in neo-Pentecostal African churches which, from a reverse mission perspective, tried to re-impose these categories on the European continent, much like European missionaries did on theirs

decades earlier. I realized that sociology cannot escape history and the conceptual universe it has engendered either. My wrenching feeling was well captured by what Nadia Fadil, in the context of an anthropology of Islam, has called a "double epistemological impasse", i.e. the challenge of navigating between, on the one hand, avoiding to frame Muslims (evangelicals) as the Other, while acknowledging their distinctiveness, and, on the other, highlighting contradictions within Islam (the evangelical movement), while recognizing their common ground (Fadil, 2019).

Ultimately, I decided that I could align myself with what Cloke and Beaumont did nevertheless, namely adopting the terms "secular" and "religious" while stripping them of their essentialist and normative flavors, thus robbing "the secular understanding of the world of any triumphal zest" (Habermas, 2008b, p. 20). Their approach allowed to take secular and religious practices, discourses, ethics and subjectivities as they take shape in particular times and spaces, while recognizing that the relationalities defining them find themselves in a constant state of motion and could "converge and undo each other" (Mittermaier, 2013). The "postsecular", in this respect, points not so much to a new rigid category as it sheds light on the myriad ways in which formations of secularity and religion, in themselves hybrid, continuously create new articulations.

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Appendix

I. Semi-structured topic list

- I briefly introduce myself and my research.
- I gain informed consent.

- What is your role/function within the organization/community?
- How did you end up there?
- How would you describe your organization/church?
    - How did your organization come into existence?
    - What does your organization stand for, in your opinion?
- Do you organize activities to socially support/help people?
    - What activities?
    - What does this assistance consist of (material, immaterial)?
    - Where do these activities take place? When?
    - Who organizes these activities (volunteers, church members, paid staff, believers, non-believers)?
- Who are the recipients of this help? Are these people from within your community? Are they believers or non-believers? Are they from the neighborhood?
- Is it important for your organization/church that the donors and/or recipients are evangelical/Muslim? Why or why not?
- Does your organization/church rely on specific principles, scriptures, ideas, or beliefs in these activities? Which ones?
- Does your organization receive subsidies for these activities?
    - If yes: From which government? How is the interaction with this government? Do you feel that your organization adapts to the government's expectations? How? What expectations? For what reason?
    - If no: Would your organization like to receive subsidies? Why or why not?
- How do you want the activities of your organization to relate to the institutionalized social security system?
- Is your organization in contact with city employees?
    - If yes: For what reasons is contact made? How often is contact made? Who initiates it? How do you experience these interactions?
    - If no: Why do you think this is the case?
    - Would you prefer to be in more or less contact with city employees and why?
- Is your organization in contact with the neighborhood it is situated in?
    - If yes: How? When? How do you experience that contact?
    - If no: Why do you think this is the case?
- Do you think your organization should be more or less integrated into its immediate surroundings? Why or why not?
- Is your organization/church in contact with other organizations/churches/actors?
    - Which ones? Are these also religiously inspired? Are they in Belgium? How do you stay in touch (physically, via the internet, through joint projects, belonging to the same (church) network, etc.)? How intense is your contact? How do you experience these contacts/partnerships?

- Do you have any questions, reflections, ideas, or things you would like to add? Thank you!

II. *Informed consent form*

Religiously inspired forms solidarity in Ghent and Antwerp

Part intended for the participant only:

I, the undersigned (name & first name) ___________________ confirm that I have been informed about the study. I have read and understood the information. The person conducting the study gave me sufficient information about the conditions and duration of the study, as well as its effect. In addition, I was given sufficient time to consider the information and to ask questions, to which I received clear answers.

- ▢ The data I provide will be treated in the strictest confidence. I am aware of the purpose for which these data are collected, processed and used in the context of this study.
- ▢ I agree with the collection, processing and use of this data as described in the participant information sheet.
- ▢ I understand that I may discontinue my participation in this study at any time after informing the investigator-in-charge, without any harm to me.
- ▢ I have been assured that my participation in the study will not be filmed and that my name will only be used in the study with my express consent.
- ▢ I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I am willing to provide information regarding my background and possible participation in other studies.
- ▢ I agree that an audio recording will be made of the conversation.
- ▢ I agree that literal quotations from the interview conducted with me may be used anonymously.

Date: _____________________

Participant's signature:_______________________________

Part for the researcher conducting the study only:

I, the undersigned (name & first name) ___________________, hereby confirm that I have discussed with _______________________ the procedures as described in the information sheet, whereby I specifically pointed out the possible risks or inconveniences related to the research. I have explicitly asked if there were any uncertainties or questions remaining and have answered these to the best of my ability. I also confirm that ___________________ has consented to participate in the study.

Date: _____________________

Signature of the investigator: _______________________________

Contact details: _______________________________________